

interzone/44

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

FEBRUARY
1991

'Piloting' by Eric Brown

Bruce Sterling
on
the Cyberpunk Bust

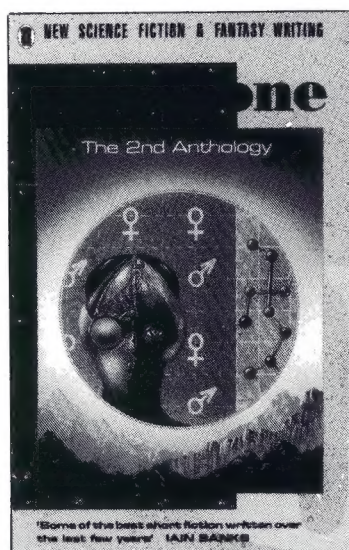
New stories by
John Christopher
Greg Egan & others
Joe Haldeman interviewed

ISSN 0264-3596

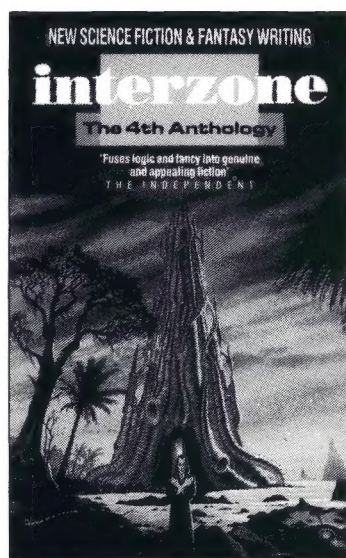


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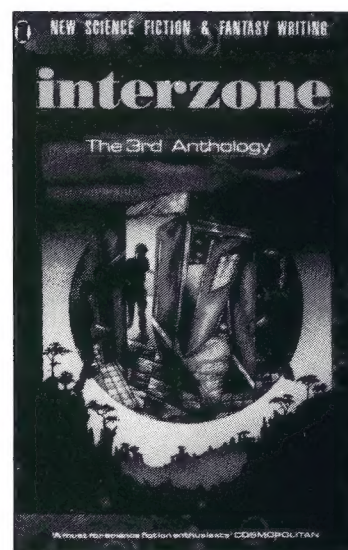
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Interface

David Pringle

We enjoy discovering new writers, and there's one more in this issue (**Alethea Amsden**) but we also enjoy publishing established sf and fantasy writers who have never contributed to *Interzone* before. This issue, we take particular pride in bringing you an original story by **John Christopher**; and next issue we have a brand new novella by **Robert Holdstock**.

After 40-odd issues, we've published most of the leading sf writers in Britain, as well as many of the best-known Americans, so it may seem odd that we've never featured work by either of these men before. But the reason is simple: they don't write many short stories these days. However, it's gratifying to know that, on the odd occasions when they do come up with something at shorter length, they think first of *Interzone*.

SARAH SELLS

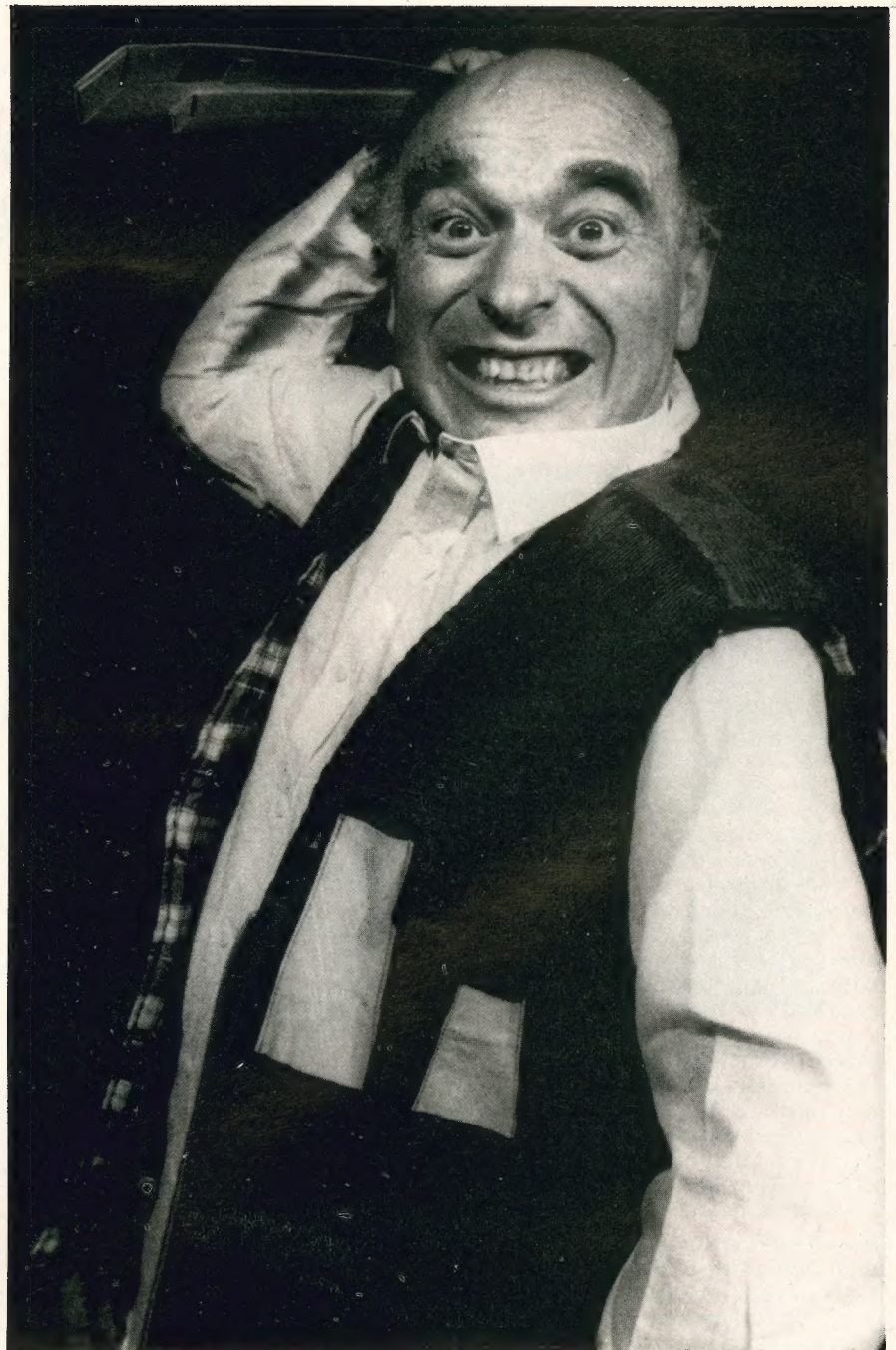
In *Interzone* 42 (the all-female issue) we reported that **Karen Joy Fowler** had yet to find a publisher for her novel *Sarah Canary*. I'm happy to say that no sooner had that issue of *IZ* reached print than we received the good news that the book has been accepted by Holt for US publication in the autumn of 1991. Although the sf content is marginal, it's a highly imaginative work and I advise all our readers watch out for it.

Also with reference to the author notes in *IZ* 42, I'd like to make two small corrections. **Lisa Tuttle's** BSFA Award-winning short story appeared in the anthology *Zenith* (ed. David Garnett) – not *Other Edens III* (ed. Holdstock and Evans). And **Carolyn Ives Gilman** lives in the town of Moscow, Idaho – not Indiana, as we erroneously stated.

CAMPBELL, THE FURTIVE NUDIST

We've been sent information about a new play by **Ken Campbell**, "The Recollections of a Furtive Nudist." As well as being an extremely well-known face on British television, Ken Campbell is familiar to sf fans as the founder of the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool and as collaborator with writers **Douglas Adams** and **Brian Aldiss** on various stage projects.

"Furtive Nudist" is described as "a treasure of wild improbabilities,



Ken Campbell in 'Furtive Nudist'

bizarre coincidences and weird manifestations – an Arabian Nights of our time." It can be seen at the Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith, London, between 10th and 26th January 1991 (every night except Sundays). Tickets are £7 (£5.50 concessions) and can be booked by phoning 081-748 3354.

THE DREADED SLUSHPILE

We have taken on yet another assistant editor, **Matthew Dickens**, who is currently a postgraduate student at Sussex University (readers may remember his short story "Great Chain of Being" in *IZ* 34). Like **Paul Annis**, **Paul Brazier** and the indefatigable **Andy Robertson**, Matthew works for this magazine

primarily as a manuscript reader; and, like the others, his labours are entirely unpaid – he does what he does for the love of it.

The number of unsolicited story manuscripts which come to *Interzone* grows ever larger: we must have received well over 200 per month in the past six months. It has been more than we've been able to cope with (especially since Simon Ounsley's illness, mentioned here last month) and we apologize to all those writers who have been kept waiting far too long for a response. Now that Matthew has joined the team, we trust that authors will hear from us more quickly.

Nevertheless, it needs to be re-stated now and again that our primary function as editors is to produce a maga-

zine, not to act as a reading service for aspiring authors. Much as we'd like to give advice to writers, we usually don't have the time. One thing we beg of you: please read the magazine before you submit (it's surprising how many would-be authors don't). If you do read *Interzone* you'll keep us happy.

And not only may you learn a thing or two from the stories we do publish, but you'll find frequent articles like **Bruce Sterling's** "A Workshop Lexicon" (IZ 39) and **David Barrett's** response to it (this issue) – pieces which are directly relevant to the art of writing sf short stories. You may also find occasional interviews with sf book editors (see **Stan Nicholls'** round-robin interview in issues 41 and 43) or literary agents (upcoming), all of which are apt to contain advice of value to new writers.

MORE STAFF NEEDED

Interzone needs more helpers. Not, at present, more slushpile readers, but people with certain other specialist skills. We'd be interested in hearing from readers who think they may be able to assist, on a part-time, minimally paid basis. Specifically, we need two types of assistant:

(1) A graphic designer, who will work to improve the design and layout of the magazine. We have been without a designer for years, although our typesetter, **Bryan Williamson**, has done his bit to fill the gap.

(2) An advertising sales person, who will phone, write to, or visit publishers, booksellers and others who may be cajoled into advertising in our pages. There's a good deal of scope for us to increase our advertising revenue, but it takes time, effort and a gift of persuasiveness which we have all too often lacked.

Ideally, both persons should be based in Brighton or London, or somewhere within easy reach. They should be willing to work for little financial reward – essentially, payment would be according to results. Other obvious requirements are talent, enthusiasm and an understanding of the magazine's aims. Yes, we're asking for the moon: please contact me if you think you can deliver it.

(David Pringle)

The photograph above right shows **Andy Robertson**, heroic assistant editor, his loins girded in readiness to cut a swathe through *Interzone's* slushpile.



Interaction

Dear Editors:

Some feedback on the excellent issue 41 for you. The fictional territory was the *Interzone* heartland of superior prose from newish but notable authors. Eric Brown's tale of unreliable native bearers in Kenya was remarkably readable, considering how much I normally dislike such stories. It was a delight to see his prose techniques maturing. My only cavil was that Eric's outer-space setting had a lesser sense of strangeness than Glenn Grant's near-future Earth. But it was enjoyable, and if it was the best story in the issue the others weren't far behind.

Now for a credit-where-credit's-due note. Previously I have asserted that *Interzone* should emphasize fiction rather than the features, so I feel I should now admit that you have converted me to the view that the features are essential. This month I very much appreciated the interviews with David Brin and the British sf editors. All credit to Stan Nicholls, and to his interviewees for their time and their forthright answers.

I was especially interested in the views expressed by John Jarrold. I wonder if his observation about mid-list/anthology poor sales is reflecting the late-Eighties social change? We're getting a video generation with too many teenagers growing up as passive receivers. As I have found with my

own staff and with reports from Services recruiters, for example, so many youngsters today do not know the basics of feeding, clothing and cleaning themselves, let alone know difficult stuff like reading short stories. (This is the author of "Green and Pleasant Land" lecturing you now.) If the video kids have trouble learning to carry dirty dishes to the sink or to replace used-up toilet rolls or even to wash themselves, it's no wonder they have trouble learning to adjust to a new world-view with each new short story. That's hard work. Trilogies are easier. Videos are easier still. I understand that collectors of the traditional sf magazines among young people number few or zero these days. This does not bode well for *Interzone* ever becoming a mass circulation magazine.

In fact the future looks less and less encouraging for publishers generally, with not just Mr Jarrold but most of the other editors bemoaning over-publishing and declining sales. So the polls indicating an aging readership for sf are probably correct. I hope *Interzone* can continue to swim against the tide of history...

So your non-fiction this time gave me much to ponder. Thanks to all involved. Also, my thanks to your artists this time. The glossier paper may shine too much under the bedside lamp, but it does reproduce their work more clearly, and breaking out from your traditional one-column format has certainly helped. Merit stars for issue 41 to Coleclough (p.9), Byers (p.15 – shows life in the old format yet with brilliant interplay of composition), Miller (p.35), Cullen (p.47/49), and Mike Hadley's "phew" on p.56. This is the first issue I can recall where I liked at least one illustration from each artist. Great!

David Redd

Haverfordwest, Wales

Dear Editors:

Ten books on my shelf and on my mind today; mostly thinking about books which push at edges of what literature is about and in doing so, push at edge of what science fiction is about.

1 – *In a Land of Clear Colours* by Robert Sheckley (Spain, 1976, limited and all too neglected edition). The best story of extra-terrestrial exploration, even better than Sheckley's own story, "Aspects of Lagranek."

2 – *Plus* by Joseph McElroy (USA 1977). Fantastic! novel of a mind rewired as "machine" remembering its humanity; Gertrude Stein in outer space.

3 – *Birthplace: Moving Into Nearness* by William Wilson (North Point Press 1982). Beautiful epistolary novel set on post-apocalypse Caribbean island. Somehow much of the positive aesthe-

Continued on page 72



Piloting

ERIC BROWN

Abbie covered light years in an instant. She stepped into the telemass portal on Earth and emerged on Nea Kikládhes without breaking her stride. She hurried from the acropolis and paused at the top of the thousand steps carved into the slope of the mountainside. From this elevation she had a perfect view of the archipelago stretching towards the horizon of the waterworld, and the lambent sunset which, on this planet, lasted for hours and was the time when all work ceased and play began. Abbie started down the steps, her ease giving no hint of her apprehension.

She strolled along the illuminated boulevard, set with tables at which the Altered, the Augmented and the Omegas disported themselves, waited upon by boosted-primates, chimpanzees and gibbons. She hurried past a group of Altereded, humans who had assumed the partial forms of beasts, extinct or mythical. Zebra-men traded gossip about celebrities with unicorn-women. Other Altereded had kept their human form but for the affectation of fur or scales.

She found a vacant table beside the sea, among a group of her own kind. To a soul, these sophisticates were handsome and well-dressed, of human form and proud of the fact, disdainful of their loud and frivolous neighbours. They wore tasteful cortical implants, spinal addenda which showed only as a knife-edge ridge beneath gown or robe.

Along the boulevard, at some remove from the cyber-assisted clique, sat the dignified Omegas. They were neither Altered or Augmented, and had about them the appearance of great age without infirmity: they were ancient and yet youthful. At the sight of their white gowns, Abbie drew a breath and looked away. Never before had she witnessed so many immortals together in one place.

While she waited, she watched a fish-boy sporting in the shallows. Sleek and silver, he stitched the calm surface of the ocean with dives and leaps. He saw her watching, sprang from the water and landed like a single, errant wave. He was beautifully muscled, with a shock of silver hair, a chevron of gills at his neck and a fin concertinaed against his spine. He sat and



drew his thighs to his chest, hugged his shins and regarded Abbie over his knees.

He smiled. "Are you requiring a guide?"

"I'm here on business, not pleasure."

"Are you an artist, here for the Contest? Would you like me to take your proposal to the judges?"

"No," she said, "and no..."

The boy opened his gills and shunted air, as if in derision. "Immortality is the prize. Did you know that? I can't claim to be an artist, but come the Contest I'll be diving."

Abbie nodded politely. She had heard that the caste of immortals occasionally sponsored artistic contests, offering increased longevity for the artists deemed the finest. Omegas themselves could not create, and she wondered if the sponsorship was an act of amendment for their inability.

The fish-boy cocked his head prettily. "Then why are you here?"

"As I said, on business."

He frowned and scanned the exposed areas of her flesh for sign of augmentations. "Your facility?"

She lifted her dark hair to reveal the plates at the base of her skull. "I'm a Pilot. I've been hired by the artist, Wellard."

His large eyes registered surprise. "Wellard? Mad Wellard, the Primitivist?"

"You know his work?"

"His work?" The fish-boy flung back his head in a burst of raucous laughter. "He's a Primitivist! A true primitive – un-Altered, un-Augmented..."

Abbie disliked his arrogance. "The work by him that I've seen – his early work – communicates true emotions, unlike so much art today, clinical, emotionless, without soul."

He rejoined: "Do you understand today's art?"

"Should one have to understand it to appreciate it?"

"Today's art is a science, for the literate. Surely, as an Augmented..."

She began to explain that her facility did not endow her with increased intellection, and in doing so cursed herself for sounding as though she were making excuses for her lack of knowledge.

"Be careful with Wellard," the fish-boy warned.

"The rumour is that he keeps his daughter locked in a dome on his island."

Abbie glanced at her watch. Wellard was late.

The fish-boy smiled intuitively. "Wellard drinks heavily," he informed her. "You'll probably have to make your own way there."

He looked out to sea. "Behold, the opening ceremony..." His large eyes regarded the darkening sky with fascination. "See – the Supra-sapiens."

These beings – Abbie had never actually seen one before, merely heard stories – were one step beyond the Omegas. They had divested themselves of their physical forms and assumed identities of pure energy. They were sparkling points of light as capricious as the wind, beholden to no one and to no state or planet.

"Tonight they dance for the Omegas," the fish-boy breathed. "Aren't they...aren't they beautiful?"

They choreographed intricate manoeuvres against the indigo heavens. Never still, they trailed images of themselves through the night like comet's tails. Abbie understood that the performance was more than just a display of calculated aesthetics, which at first was all she had assumed it to be. According to one commentator, the trajectories of the dozen Supra-sapiens were, taken in total, the representational math of universal quantum verities.

Then the lights disappeared along every point of the compass, streaking away around the curves of the planet, and their exit presaged the fall of night and the appearance of the Core stars overhead like the brilliant spread of a chandelier.

Wellard arrived one hour later.

He approached in his launch from his private island, one of the chain that curved away into the distance like the individual vertebrae of some great fossilized saurian. He moored his vessel at the end of the jetty, then walked towards the boulevard and paused halfway, hands on hips, a sturdy and intimidating silhouette against the star-field. Or was it Abbie alone who divined the threat in his posture as he gazed down at the assembled artists? His arrival had occasioned a murmur of comment.

"From the sublime," the fish-boy said, "to the ridiculous."

Abbie stood. "I must go."

"If you do decide that you need anything..." He held up a communicator on his wrist and gave her his code.

Abbie made her way to the jetty. She was aware, as she approached Wellard over the creaking boards of the pier, that she was the centre of attention. It had the effect of making her meeting with the artist all the more fraught.

"Are you the pilot?" It was almost a roar.

She nodded, unable to look him in the eye. He was squat and powerful, and seemed to emanate a raw animal emotion – in this case animosity – unchecked by the sophistication of alteration or augmentation.

"I requested a male pilot."

"I was allotted the job –" Which was a lie; she had bribed her superior to give her the commission. "I assure you that I can do what you want just as well as –"

"I've no doubt," he said. His misogyny, according

to rumour, had increased during his self-imposed exile on the planet.

He nodded grudgingly. "Very well..."

As she followed him back to the launch and climbed in beside him, Abbie wondered whether her physical revulsion of Wellard was merely because he was a primitive.

The engine fired, lifted the launch and shot them away from the jetty on a long curve paralleling the diminishing islands of the archipelago. Wellard sat at the tiller, staring ahead. In marked contrast to the artists on the boulevard, he was dishevelled and shabbily dressed. It was as if he affected the bohemian persona of an artist from myth to score some personal point against those he regarded as no more than artisans and technicians. His forearms scintillated with crystal dust, like gauntlets, and his square, ruddy face was streaked with belligerent dabs of war-paint. Abbie knew that he was almost sixty, though he appeared older.

Wellard's studio and living quarters comprised three domes suspended over the ocean on a series of cantilevers. He ran the launch aground on a beach beneath the projecting hemisphere of the first dome, and led the way to a spiral staircase which accessed the flat underside.

Abbie was not prepared for the sight of the work of art which rose from the deck to the apex of the studio. The hologram stood perhaps five metres high, a light-sculpture of a beautiful woman. The subject stood demure and at ease, like a Greek goddess. Other pieces littered the room, but none so stunning as the raven-haired Mediterranean beauty.

"My wife," Wellard said briefly. "She died almost thirty years ago, giving birth to my daughter. We were living in the wilds of Benson's Landfall at the time, in retreat from contemporary trends." He stopped himself and regarded Abbie, as if resentful at having imparted this information.

She moved around the room, laying hands on crystals, regarding light sculptures. He even worked in the ancient medium of oils on canvas. He watched her from the exit to the second dome, as if impatient to usher her away. "Don't bother telling me what you think – I already know. You Augmented are all the same. You have no appreciation of the truth of the work by the artists you call Primitives."

It was a moment before she could bring herself to reply. She found his attitude of injured pride rather pathetic, like a chided child convinced of his worth. She sought to subdue him with praise.

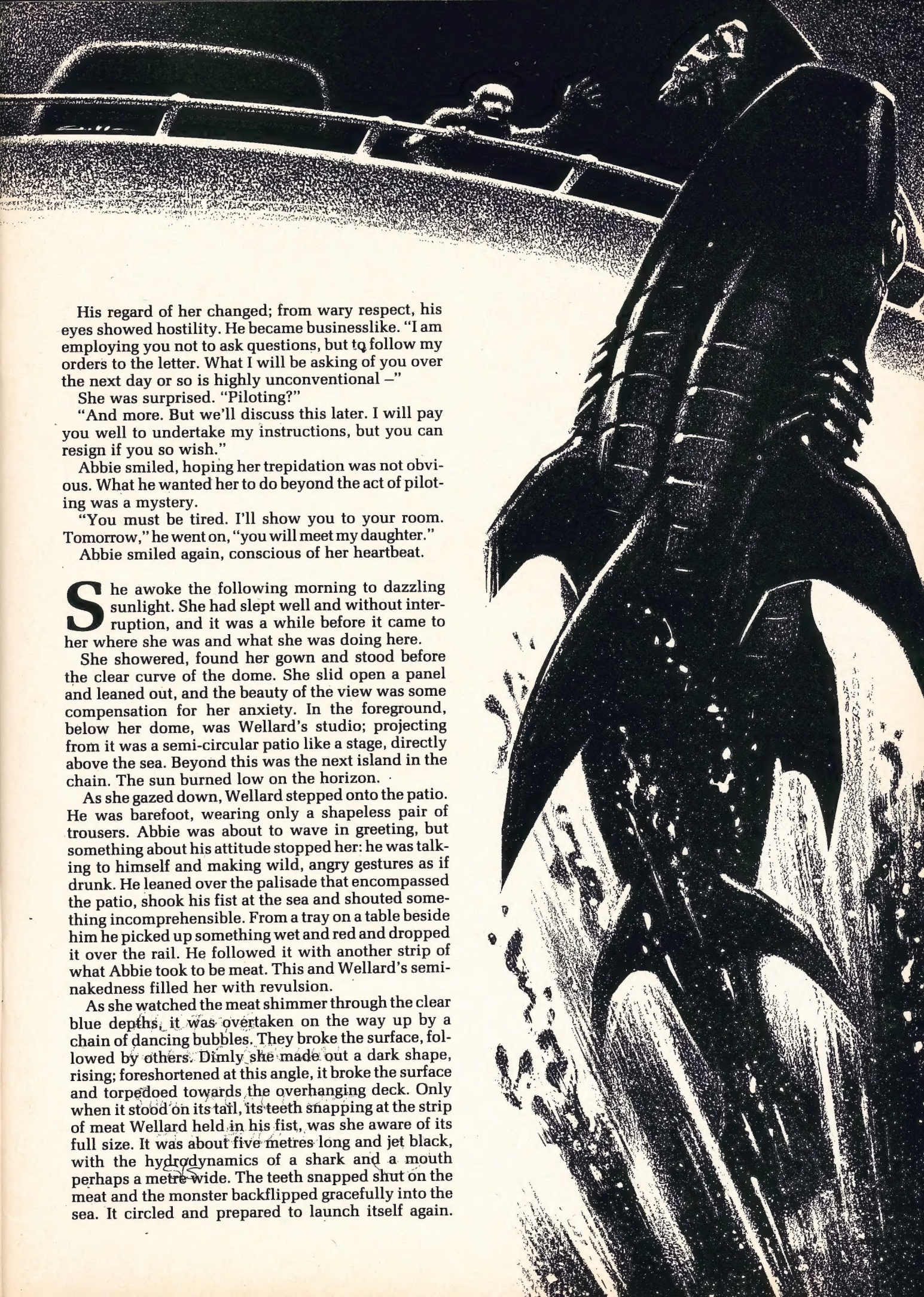
"On the contrary, I find your work very powerful. I'm moved by it. Few artists these days are so honest, so open – few would admit to their faults and weaknesses. Your guilt is very apparent."

"Art is the communication of true emotion –" He regarded her with what might have been new respect, hedged with suspicion. "Regret and guilt constitute so much of my past. Perhaps by trying to come to terms with the guilt through my work I might cure myself –"

"To find you can no longer create?"

He gave a grudging smile. "Isn't all art a striving for an elusive cure?"

She gazed around at the work in progress and tried to calculate the hours invested in creation. She gestured. "Don't you ever feel like...like giving in?"



His regard of her changed; from wary respect, his eyes showed hostility. He became businesslike. "I am employing you not to ask questions, but to follow my orders to the letter. What I will be asking of you over the next day or so is highly unconventional —"

She was surprised. "Piloting?"

"And more. But we'll discuss this later. I will pay you well to undertake my instructions, but you can resign if you so wish."

Abbie smiled, hoping her trepidation was not obvious. What he wanted her to do beyond the act of piloting was a mystery.

"You must be tired. I'll show you to your room. Tomorrow," he went on, "you will meet my daughter."

Abbie smiled again, conscious of her heartbeat.

She awoke the following morning to dazzling sunlight. She had slept well and without interruption, and it was a while before it came to her where she was and what she was doing here.

She showered, found her gown and stood before the clear curve of the dome. She slid open a panel and leaned out, and the beauty of the view was some compensation for her anxiety. In the foreground, below her dome, was Wellard's studio; projecting from it was a semi-circular patio like a stage, directly above the sea. Beyond this was the next island in the chain. The sun burned low on the horizon.

As she gazed down, Wellard stepped onto the patio. He was barefoot, wearing only a shapeless pair of trousers. Abbie was about to wave in greeting, but something about his attitude stopped her: he was talking to himself and making wild, angry gestures as if drunk. He leaned over the palisade that encompassed the patio, shook his fist at the sea and shouted something incomprehensible. From a tray on a table beside him he picked up something wet and red and dropped it over the rail. He followed it with another strip of what Abbie took to be meat. This and Wellard's semi-nakedness filled her with revulsion.

As she watched the meat shimmer through the clear blue depths, it was overtaken on the way up by a chain of dancing bubbles. They broke the surface, followed by others. Dimly she made out a dark shape, rising; foreshortened at this angle, it broke the surface and torpedoed towards the overhanging deck. Only when it stood on its tail, its teeth snapping at the strip of meat Wellard held in his fist, was she aware of its full size. It was about five metres long and jet black, with the hydrodynamics of a shark and a mouth perhaps a metre wide. The teeth snapped shut on the meat and the monster backflipped gracefully into the sea. It circled and prepared to launch itself again.

Wellard was laughing like a maniac, leaning out over the ocean with another length of meat.

"Soon!" he cried, as the shark-thing rose, hung in suspension at the zenith of its climb, snapped and backflipped. "Soon, you will have your way. Be patient!"

The meat consumed, Wellard turned and made his way unsteadily back into the studio. Abbie ducked out of sight.

She jumped as the chime sounded and Wellard's voice paged her. "Are you awake? Would you care to join me on the patio?"

She found the speaker and, controlling the tremor in her voice, answered that she would be down right away.

"It's been light for a good two hours!" Wellard greeted her. "I've been up since dawn. I always do my best work before breakfast." He waved for her to be seated. He had started his meal already. The table was piled with fruit, bread and cheese. Wellard drank from an oversized goblet; he was more than a little tipsy.

"You've been working today?" She thought it wise not to mention the episode with the sea monster.

He winked at her enigmatically. "Just putting the finishing touches to a little project."

As they ate, Wellard expounded on the history of Nea Kikládhes, its discovery and subsequent exploration by the telenauts, and how it became the haunt of the galaxy's richest artists.

Abbie listened politely, sipping fruit juice and taking small bites of honeyed bread. Wellard had changed from the sombre, embittered artist of last night; he was animated now, almost excited. She wondered how much this transformation was due to the wine, how much to a residual elation from his encounter with the shark-thing.

She became aware that he had been staring at her for a time in silence. She looked up and saw that his gaze was fixed on her forehead just below the hairline.

"I didn't see that last night," he said.

"Oh." She raised a hand to the tattoo.

He smiled tipsily. "I'm sorry - I don't keep up with the latest Augmented shorthand." His tone was sarcastic. "But doesn't that denote a second body?"

Abbie nodded, watching him.

"I must admit... to a Primitivist, the thought of having a second body - I mean, not content with your first... I find it rather amusing... and pathetic."

"To many an Augmented out there in the real world," she said, "your reactionary attitude would be considered pathetic. Bodychange is established practice, Mr Wellard. This," she gestured from head to foot, "is a somatic simulation..."

He was staring. "You're a computer?"

"I'm wholly biological, I assure you."

He shook his head. "Who were you before... before the change?"

"The same person I am now, of course. All that is different is the body and the name."

"But why did you change?" He seemed to find it hard to believe that anyone should want to discard the body with which they were born. "Were you diseased?"

She shook her head. "I... I found myself in an in-

tolerable situation. I had to get away without being traced."

He seemed to have sobered a little. He cleared his throat. "I find it hard to imagine how someone so... so Augmented can possibly appreciate my art, as you claim to."

"I am still human," she replied. "Your work speaks to me."

They ate in silence for a while.

Abbie changed the subject. "Do you intend to enter the Contest?" she asked.

Wellard snorted. "As if they'd look twice at anything I submitted! And anyway, the Omegas have a bias for dramatic presentations, plays and tragedies of old."

"I was told that immortality is the reward for the winners."

He laughed. "What hell! Do you really think I desire all eternity in which to contemplate and regret the deeds of my past?" He cast her a stricken look. "And anyway, how might I spend eternity, unable to create?"

"Immortals have no reason to create," Abbie said. "They have time to answer every question; they're no longer slaves to psychological conflict. Imagine being free of the devil that drives you..."

"I can imagine other ways," he said, more to himself than to Abbie. Then it was his turn to change the subject. "Come. It's time for you to meet my daughter."

Abbie followed him through the studio to the third dome, sick with apprehension.

The dead woman lay naked and very still, cocooned in a crystal catafalque above the computer system. Subdermal electrode implants showed as raised discs beneath her pale skin. She was very much like the hologram of her mother, and just as beautiful. Her chest rose and fell with measured breaths. Wellard stood beside her, stroking hair from her brow, and Abbie almost cried aloud at the poignancy of the father and daughter tableau and all it represented.

Wellard emerged from his reverie. "Technically, Zoe is dead. This system has kept her body alive for fifteen years. Her mind is empty, blank." He smiled. "Thanks to the system, she is capable of limited motion."

He hit a command key; the electrodes fired and Zoe spasmed. The contrast between the sleeping woman as she was and this helplessly jerking corpse was painful to behold. Abbie winced, turned away.

Through her fingers she watched the woman sit up, drag her legs from the catafalque and stand clumsily. She took half a dozen faltering steps, her father in close attendance. What was so tragic about this woeful parody of a marionette was that the technology at Wellard's command was over a decade old. A modern system could fit unobtrusively at the base of her skull and give her the swinging gait of a mannequin. There was such a thing as respect for the dead.

And there were pilots...

Wellard returned his daughter to her resting place and glanced at Abbie. "Well?"

"If you could leave us alone for a time..."

When Wellard had finally departed, after lovingly arranging his daughter's hair, Abbie approached the dead woman and stared down at her. A regime of regular, computer-assisted exercises had maintained her muscle tone, but her moribund eyes suggested a

similar deterioration of mind. Abbie kissed the girl on the lips, fighting to control her emotions, and slipped into a sitting position on the floor. She reached behind her head and activated her occipital system.

The sensation was as if she had suddenly switched off her senses. She existed in a lightless limbo, unaware of her own physicality. What happened next had a perfectly rational scientific explanation, but the process always came to Abbie in the image of a dispossessed awareness (her own) floating into a vacated seat of consciousness (her subject's). She insinuated herself into the derelict neural pathways of Zoe's brain, exploring the intricate matrix of the dead woman's nervous system. She was aware of an extreme weariness, the leaden weight of a body fifteen years dead. There would be much that she would be unable to do with Zoe, and more that she would only be able to make function at a much reduced capacity. In normal circumstances her subjects were newly dead and easily manageable. Zoe would be a test of her abilities.

She opened Zoe's eyes, made out the sunlight beyond the dome as if through a fathom of ocean. With care she flexed the right leg, then the left. She sat up, and her misted vision swung from the upper curve of the dome to the far wall. She was swamped with nausea, dizziness. She gripped the edge of the catafalque and pushed herself to her feet. Swaying, she took a tentative first step, then a second. She glanced down and noticed herself sprawled across the tiles, her eyes vellicating behind closed lids, a soft moan escaping her lips. Then she looked down at Zoe's body, the small breasts, the curving thighs, and although she wanted more than anything to cry, the dead girl's tear ducts would not oblige.

She walked across the dome, her first faltering steps giving way to a more confident stride. She moved her arms, fingers and neck in the prescribed routine of rehabilitation, not unlike the precise choreography of a Balinese dancer. Sounds came to her, but distant, muffled. Likewise the sense of touch relayed objects to her as if they were wrapped in fleece. She stared at the dead woman's reflection in the dome. She opened her mouth, expelled air, then a scrap of sound. "Hell...hell...hello. Hello. I...am...Zoe. Wellard is...insane." The words came one by one, creaking from a larynx redundant for years. She experimented with complex sentences, wry observations, obscenities directed at Wellard, and then she relented: "Wellard cannot help...himself. He is a victim of...circumstance. I am Zoe Wellard. How do you...do?"

She returned to the catafalque, sat carefully and lay down. She closed her eyes, allowed her awareness to drain slowly from the body.

Abbie opened her own eyes and found herself lying on the floor. She lay blinking up at the dome, disoriented at the shift back to her own body. She stood wearily, touched the Zoe's brow and wept.

She had known, when her agency had received the commission, what Wellard required, but his precise motives now, as then, were a mystery.

Wellard was seated on the patio, staring out across the ocean, when Abbie stepped from the studio and joined him. He looked up. "Well?"

She did not realize, until she sat down opposite

him, how much the piloting had drained her. She felt physically weak, emotionally unstable. She had the urge to snap: "Well, what?" But it was obvious what he wanted to know.

"I can pilot her," she replied. "She can walk, talk, hear, see. I could maintain control for an hour, maybe more." She watched him closely.

Wellard smiled, a paradoxically boyish grin on a face so rugged. "That should be quite long enough."

"For what?" she asked.

He reached out to the table and picked up a sheaf of paper, an antique medium appropriate to Wellard's Primitivism. He passed it to Abbie.

She leafed through the sheaf. It was an old fashioned



play-script, a dialogue between two characters. She scanned the top sheet, bearing the title *Atonement*, and the opening. Time: fifteen years ago. Setting: the patio of an artist's dome, Mikonos, Earth. Dramatis personae: Benedict Wellard, an artist; Zoe Wellard, his daughter.

Wellard: The love I had for your mother was unique.

Zoe: Please, father...

Abbie looked up from the script and stared at Wellard.

His smile, the light in his eyes, suggested more than just enthusiasm for the entertainment he had planned. "It is the transcription of my final meeting with my daughter. It's verbatim up to a certain point, at which I have allowed myself a degree of artistic licence. Please, read on..."

Abbie regarded the opening lines, a constriction in her throat, then slowly read her way through the following pages. Her heart hammered and gradually she became less aware of herself; she was wholly captivated by the words on the page as the drama unfolded its terrible logic.

She was only peripherally aware of Wellard, watching her.

She lowered the last page and stared at the artist, seeing only the tragic finale, the denouement that Wellard had himself fashioned to stand as testament to his overwhelming guilt.

"Well?" he smiled.

She shook her head. "It's sick..."

His expression became grim. "Whether it is sick or not does not detract from its fundamental truth. Tonight's re-enactment will bring the cycle to a close with my fitting punishment..."

"But you don't deserve... this."

"Who are you to say what I do not deserve?" he snapped. He stood and paced to the edge of the patio, then sat side-saddle on the rail and regarded her. "What I did fifteen years ago – and it isn't in the script – was... unforgivable. It brought about my daughter's demise and has plagued me ever since."

Abbie sat without moving, shocked at the thought of the role Wellard wanted her to play. "But even so..."

"Please, allow me to explain." The artist drew a long breath and stared into the ocean. "My daughter, Zoe, was a telenaut. Fifteen years ago the science was still in its initial stages – the telemass process was crude, compared with the system as we know it today. The only people who 'massed' were the telenauts, and the incidence of fatalities was high. Back then, the body of a telenaut was duplicated and fired to its destination, the planet under investigation. Then the telenaut's cerebral identity was beamed after it. This way, even if the duplicated doppelganger was injured or killed, the telenaut's identity could be retrieved and restored to its original body. At fifteen, Zoe was a veteran of some dozen missions to the planets of stars within a radius of twenty light years from Earth. On the occasion of our final meeting she was contemplating the commission to be 'massed' here, Nea Kikládhes, then an unexplored world. No one had ever before been telemassed thousands of light years through space. It was highly dangerous, and needless to say I did not want her to go."

Abbie whispered, "You can't hold yourself responsible."

Wellard ignored her. "We had an argument, more or less as set down in the script. Then I did something terrible. I was desperate at the time – some might say unbalanced – though I'm not pleading this as an excuse... Zoe fled, vowing that she intended to take the commission and saying that she hoped she died. She was my only daughter, so much like my wife..." Wellard took a breath, glanced from the sea to Abbie. "Less than one week later I heard from her private clinic in Athens that her body was awaiting collection. She had bequeathed it to me in the event of an accident. It was kept alive – if you can call it that – by a sophisticated computer system. I had her moved to my studio. I tried to investigate the circumstances of her death, but the Telemass Organization was paranoid about secrecy and I learned nothing."

"What do you think happened to her?" Abbie murmured.

The sun was beginning its long fall towards the horizon, bringing to a close the short Kikládhean day. Overhead, the Core stars were coming out. Wellard returned to his seat across the table from Abbie and smiled to himself. "Zoe never said much about her work, but I do recall something she told me once. She said that one of the exercises involved entering the mind of a hummingbird, viewing the world through its consciousness. She told me that for the period of an hour, she was that hummingbird." He shrugged. "This appealed to my primitive imagination."

"A number of years after receiving my daughter's body, I learned that Nea Kikládhes was being opened up as a resort complex for artists. I had my studio duplicated and moved here with my daughter." He poured more wine, took a mouthful and paused before continuing. "During my first year here I used my launch to ferry provisions from the telemass station to my studio, and on every trip I was followed by a leviathan – a deep sea monster like a shark, though larger. It attacked me several times. I know it was the same monster – I once scarred its flank with an ill-aimed harpoon, and the distinguishing mark was clearly visible. It struck me as obvious..." Wellard said, staring at Abbie with total conviction, as if to forestall her incredulity, "that, when she was beamed here fifteen years ago, the consciousness of my daughter had found itself somehow trapped in the monstrous form of the sea creature..."

Abbie wanted to laugh, and then to cry, but Wellard stared at her with frightening certitude, his knuckles white where they gripped the goblet.

He indicated the script. "Now, you appreciate the symmetrical perfection of my final work?"

Abbie stood and moved to the rail, her back to Wellard so that he could not see her tears. Across the curve of the ocean, a sparkling troupe of Suprasapiens performed aerobatics above the largest island, entertaining the gathered artists.

"Well?" Wellard said. "Will you take part in my little finale?"

Abbie gripped the rail. On the horizon, the will-o-the-wisps described symbols of infinity.

She nodded. "Very well... yes."

They drank a toast, and Abbie hurriedly excused herself and retired with the script to her dome. For a long time she lay on the sunken sleeping

pad, memorizing the stilted dialogue. Later she stood and walked to the clear wall of the dome, stared out across the ocean to the island on which she had arrived the night before. Lights illuminated the length of the sea-front boulevard. The Supra-sapiens played – or communicated universal verities, meaningless to her? – in the darkening sky. Abbie reached beneath her hair, opened the communication channel and arranged to meet the fish-boy. Then she returned to the sleeping pad and with a stylus struck out Wellard's original title and replaced it with her own: *Redemption*. Then she turned to the final pages, where the scenario diverged from the original dialogue, and rewrote the ending to her own satisfaction.

Later, when the fish-boy emerged from the sea and sat awaiting her on a rock, the starlight illuminating his wet nakedness like some fabulous figure from myth, Abbie left the dome and joined him. She passed him the revised dialogue, along with her instructions, and he placed the script in his pouch and dived gracefully into the sea.

Abbie returned to the dome and lay down, her pulse accelerated. Overhead the stars burned with a rhythmic pulse. She could almost hypnotize herself, watching them.

Beside her, the speaker crackled. "Abbie...are you ready to begin?"

The transference was easier this time, the precincts of Zoe's sensorium no longer unfamiliar territory. Also she could control the body with relative facility, co-ordinate the movement of the limbs so that Zoe could perform with grace. She wore an ankle-length gown and facial cosmetics, as prescribed in the script; she presented to the world a calm composure, a neutral expression and a steady gaze. Inside, though, Abbie was numbed with fear. She had memorized Wellard's script, but it was not the recall of the lines that worried her so much as his reactions to her amendments. The satisfactory outcome of the imminent drama depended wholly on her delivery, on the degree to which she could convince him.

She walked Zoe through the studio; it was in darkness, but the hologram of Zoe's mother was illuminated, and had been turned to overlook the performance area of the patio.

Abbie stepped through the sliding door. The patio was bathed in silver brilliance, surrounded by the night. She thought she could see the occasional flicker of a Supra-sapient, but could not be sure: her attention was wholly taken by the dominant figure of Benedict Wellard, centre stage.

He was attired in a smart grey suit, and with his hair combed back he presented a substantially altered figure to the dishevelled bohemian of that afternoon. The sight of him like this caused Abbie's pulse to race. She took up her position to stage left, staring out into the night with her back to him, awaiting his opening line. It came.

"The love I had for your mother was unique."

The words caught in her throat. She managed, "Father, please..."

"I don't think I've mentioned this to you before."

"Yes you have – many times."

"I must tell you how we met."

Abbie turned Zoe's sluggish corpse. "Father!" Wellard smiled. "It was at the Saharan artist's colony of Sapphire Oasis..."

He proceeded to describe that first meeting, his initial infatuation, which turned in time to love and respect. Cornelia Bethany was an accomplished artist, a Primitivist like Wellard. They shared similar techniques, theories. They became inseparable. Wellard recounted all this, and announced with a reflective smile that one month later they were married.

"I've heard this so many times before!"

"One more time will do you no harm."

"No! I've heard enough." She raised her hands to her ears in histrionic denial of his words. He continued, regardless.

"For two years we worked together on joint projects."

He described their work, how they planned to construct Primitivist crystals and holograms, synthesized from their unique harmonic perspective, the like of which the world had never seen before. With their creations they hoped to storm the insular sensibilities of the critics, who favoured the clinical minimalist work of Augmented and Altered artists. Their aim was to bring humanism back to art.

"It was ironic that your conception came at the very height of our creativity..." Wellard continued, with a trace of sarcasm.

"We planned great things for you. We would educate you ourselves, and in time you would join us in a Primitivist triumvirate. We found an out-of-the-way colony world, set up a studio and awaited the joyous day."

"You know the rest."

"I know I'm a disappointment to you, father."

"I never really recovered after your mother's death – but I did regain my senses sufficiently to know what I wanted for you. I trained you in all the artistic techniques... You had a fine future ahead of you."

"Some would say that I still have."

"As a telenaut!" He almost spat the word. "Did I tell you that your mother detested Augmented humans?"

"Often –"

"She considered their mechanization a denial of human sensibilities. I agreed with her, and still do."

Wellard claimed that since her Augmentation she had become heartless – more, soulless. He told her that she had thoughts for no one but herself.

Abbie rejoined with the line that she had grown up so much under his influence that it was inevitable she assumed his selfishness. She cried that she had to make her own decisions, even if those decisions were the result of mere defiance.

Wellard crossed the patio and paused before her. "I don't want you to accept this latest commission." He was trembling with emotion.

She stared at him. "My life is my own!"

"But think of the danger."

Abbie, through Zoe's eyes, saw the empty tray on the table.

Wellard reached out and cupped her tear-streaked cheek. "I love you too much to lose you, Zoe."

His other hand stroked her hair, and the light of helplessness in his eyes told Abbie that he was no longer acting, that he was back on the patio of his

studio, fifteen years ago, with his daughter in his arms.

"You're so much like your mother, Zoe."

He broke away and stared into the darkened sea.

Beyond the patio, Abbie could hear the surge and splash of the leviathan as it whiplashed from the ocean. She stared at Wellard as he cried out in self-disgust.

"Zoe!" His eyes pleaded with her to follow through the business of the script. He stood beside the rail, directly above the ocean and the thrashing leviathan, awaiting the gesture from his re-animated daughter that would avenge his treatment of her and bring about the end of his guilt.

This was where the re-enactment diverged from Wellard's scenario.

Abbie said, "You don't deserve to die!"

Behind Wellard, the shark-thing leapt and snapped.

"I forgive you – can you hear me?" Abbie cried. "You're forgiven!"

Wellard stared through his daughter's eyes and addressed Abbie. "How can you forgive me? You have no idea what happened! Push me!"

"I know," Abbie said. "You attacked me, beat me until I was half-conscious and then... then you raped me, calling me all the while by my mother's name. You almost killed me – perhaps maybe you intended to, to avenge my birth. That's why I left –"

He shook his head. "Abbie? How can you know this? Who are you?"

"I'm your daughter – Zoe!" Abbie yelled at him, and all the hurt and frustration she had suppressed for years now overwhelmed her. "When I left that night I vowed revenge on you. I thought at first that I would accept the commission, to spite you – and I hoped that I'd be killed. Then I had a better idea. I bought a somatic simulation from an Augmented mart in Cairo, had myself downloaded and my emptied body returned to you. For years it delighted me to think of your grief..."

"Zoe... is it really you?" He reached out feebly. "Why did you come here?"

She stared at him. "I came back to kill you, father. I wanted true revenge."

He raised his arms in a gesture of defeat. "Then why not take it?"

"Because I saw your art. I saw how much you suffered, how guilty you were and how much you regretted doing what you did. Then I read the script... How could I bring myself to kill you when you had already decided to kill yourself?"

She finished her dialogue and held out her arms to him, and the performance was complete.

Lasers bloomed in the darkness above the dome, and Supra-sapiens materialized and turned tight spirals of delight. An open air-car bearing six Omegas hovered above the patio rail. A venerable immortal stood, smiled at Zoe and held out a hand. In sombre tones he communicated their judgement, and bade Zoe and her father step aboard.

Abbie allowed herself to more fully accommodate her body of old, felt the last tenuous link with her somatic simulation break like a silken thread. She inclined her head and stepped towards the air-car.

Then she turned and held out her arms to her father – who was standing mute in the cone of a spotlight, between one life and the next – and awaited his decision.



Eric Brown's debut collection, *The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories* (Pan Books, 1990), was recently reissued in an attractive hardcover edition by Drunken Dragon Press, Birmingham (£13.50). The publisher tells us that public-library orders of that edition have been encouragingly numerous – which goes to prove that it is still possible to make a reputation on sf short stories alone. Eric's last story here was "The Pharagean Effect" (issue 41) and there will be more from him soon.

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Thylacine, Thylacine

Sylvia M. Siddall

Dolphus scuffs along the path with his hands in his pockets, admiring the flash of his yellow socks between black shoes and black trousers. The old man hates bright colours: he wears fawn and brown and follows behind with a closed, rigid face. He remembers how it was when he was young and the old men were respected. Young men wanted to learn in those days, wanted to become as proud and as clever as the old. Now all they want are ghetto-blasters and yellow socks.

"Listen," he says again, exasperated. "You understand what you've got to do, don't you?"

"Yeah, course I do." Insolent, glib, thin as a lurcher in his black leather, the boy shrugs and stares around from beneath his sleek hair. The old man senses the boy's underlying nervousness and feels better inside. He hopes to show the kid he's not such an old fool after all and is ashamed of himself for the thought, but really – !

Behind them the soft-eyed horse plods with the sombre face and unhurried stride of his kind. He feels the steel bit in his mouth and the tug of the rein and knows no alternative to obedience.

The landscape is drought-brown under a luminous white sky, dry-eyed clouds taunt the cracked ground, the baked earth smells of ginger. Birds flap far ahead in the heavy air. The old man thinks there ought to be lizards. Dolphus needs to pee but is too proud to admit it. The horse lifts his tail, pauses and deposits a heap of round, steaming dung on the ground. The old man smiles, sniffing at the stink of horse. They are leaving an obvious trail.

They camp, old-style, cooking pot over a small fire of dry wood, careful to avoid starting a grass-fire. Once this was farm-land, rich meadows and wheat but Dolphus does not remember and dismisses his grandfather's stories as fairy-tales for kids. It has always been like this, dry, scrubby, bald and filled with flies. He is hungry, could murder a burger, but has to eat the old man's mess of roots and stewed dried meat with a good face. Was it really this awful back in the old times? How the hell did anyone survive?

The old man says that they have to take turns to watch over the horse. Dolphus listens and a trickle of doubt runs down his spine. If he is crazy, senile old gypsy, they could starve out here; if he is right – how can he be right? What lives out here in the dead lands? Dolphus talks about the greenhouse effect and smugly recites television voices, while the old man snorts and mutters over his preparations.

"You must wear these," he says and Dolphus can't help it – he laughs with a dry, hurting laughter.

"You're mad, old man! Gauntlets? What's this supposed to be? Some kind of snake-hunt? There're only adders and they're not that dangerous. Or is this to protect us from evil, is that right?"

"Wear them!" the old man commands and Dolphus' laughter dies.

"What're we doing here?"

"I thought," says the old man, voice thick with disgust, "you wanted to make money? This'll make you more money than you've dreamed of. Buy you a house by the sea and a wireless for every room if that's what you want."

Something clutches inside Dolphus' chest.

"If I wanted to be rich I would be, I'd steal whatever I wanted."

"Sure thing." Spoken with an accent from the television, taunting, the old man's words surprise him, shows that he's not so cut-off from the world after all.

"What d'you expect to find out here, wolves?" Dolphus asks seriously but receives only a glare. He sighs and scratches his armpits. His shirt is stiff with dried sweat and dust.

They watch in turn that night and all they hear is a far-off owl and all they see is the sliver of the moon in among the clouds. The horse sleeps peacefully, standing up.

They pack, scuffing dusty soil over the ashes of the fire, reeling in the old man's nylon lines, feeding the horse and eating dry bread. The old man is complacent. Dolphus has a stiff back and a headache. They walk on, in silence.

The pattern is repeated for two days and nights, footsteps in dust, wakeful nights, the lines spread out like fishing-lines. Then on the third night the old man's trap is sprung.

Dolphus wakes from a dream, the nylon line leaping through his fingers. He rolls and is on his feet, fumbling with the gauntlets that the old man insisted they wear. The old man is beside him, whispering in the darkness.

"Ah, wait, wait, let me feel – pull – yes, it's in the net! Hold tight and don't let it go! Give me the bottle!"

There is a sick-sweet smell, a flurry of action while the horse stands without a sound or the slightest shuffle of a hoof, and that is strange, for something thrashes in the net at its feet. Dolphus drags off his gloves and switches on the torch.

The circle of light slides down the horse's gleaming flank. It illuminates a face that thrills and horrifies



him, a face out of dreams and the old times. It is contorted and divided by the strands of the net, it is clenched in rage, a thin triangular face with a snarling mouth. It has long thin teeth like the fangs of a snake and its eyes are cat-yellow pools of rage. The light rakes a thin body twisting in the net, sheened with sweat and streaked with blood. Dolphus remembers his instructions and shines the light directly into the yellow eyes and the old man claps a hand over the face, his thick gloves impervious to the slashing teeth that have already shorn through two of the strands of the net. The body thrashes even more wildly but the ether-soaked rag in the old man's hand is pressed over its face and the creature subsides, gasping.

They tie its wrists and ankles and the old man thrusts a piece of wood behind the teeth, tying it in place. Dolphus sits on his heels and examines it. It is male. Its hair is long, pale and fine. It could almost be a naked boy, but for the slim fangs not quite covered by the lips and the large eyes turned up in involuntary unconsciousness. Dolphus is reminded of pictures of children dying of malnutrition: its limbs are stick-thin but it has a round, swollen belly. When he presses its abdomen, it feels taut and hot, resilient, and it moves as if full of liquid.

The horse sinks slowly and gracelessly to the ground, head stretched out, sighing. Dolphus swings the torch and sees a wound on its neck, up under the mane, where a thin rill of blood still crawls through the hair.

"He's killed the fucking horse!" Dolphus screams, beating his thigh.

The old man snaps, "don't be stupid! It'll wake later."

Their captive wakes first, groans and struggles, finding itself helpless. It hiccups and its bulging stomach quivers. Its jaw moves as it tries to spit out the gag, then it jerks wildly, jack-knifing its thin limbs. Its breathing is a high, fast whistle of pure terror. Wearing gloves, the old man grasps it by the shoulders and tells Dolphus to hold its feet. Thus rendered immobile, it subsides into trembling watchfulness.

So close, Dolphus smells a faint metallic odour, something like bruised flesh, and he can hear its whispering breath and the gurgle of its gorged belly. Dolphus stares at it, fascination and repulsion holding him in a precarious balance. Pale daylight shows a darkness inside the white, hairless dome – it is so full that it is stretched almost to translucence by its contents. Dolphus cannot escape the conviction that it has drunk blood from the horse. It is lying at his feet bloated with fresh blood. When he releases its ankles and hunches closer to examine it, it tries to pull away. The thin shoulders dig back into the earth and its tied hands go, not to its naked balls, but to protect its recent meal. It swallows audibly past the wooden gag between its jaws.

"Well," Dolphus says, "what have we caught here?"

It cannot snarl but the muscles bunch in its cheeks. The old man mutters a word that Dolphus does not know, but he has seen the films. "A little vampire creature, is it?"

The beast has unnatural ears, close against the side of its head, stiff narrow ears with a slight curl to them and pointed at the top, ears any Vulcan would be proud to wear. "Or is it a blood-drinking elf?" He

cannot help but grin at its obvious discomfort as it lies, belching sickly, in the dust.

The horse wakes eventually. The old man tells Dolphus how the bite of the fangs delivers a venom that causes sleep. Dolphus thinks of old children's stories, of fairies that send men to sleep for a hundred years. He looks at the small, furious body on the ground with its big, slanting eyes and pointed ears and he thinks of piskies and leprechauns and he cannot believe what his eyes are telling him.

"We're going to be rich!" he crows and dances in a circle, his yellow socks flashing. "Fucking hell, we'll make our fortunes!" He closes his eyes and thinks of clothes so snappy they shout "Money!" and of the thin, cruel city women with sharp heels and sharper faces, clever women, rich women.

"Listen," his grandfather says like a damned tape. "Listen good. How d'you think we can make money from this? You think we can just knock on a door and say 'Buy this vampire from me, Sir?' If we go to a museum they'll shout 'Police' and take it away, they'll say it belongs to the nation. Or we find a rich man. D'you think he wants to buy this thing from a pair of gypsy thieves? No-one will believe a word of it. We have to think about this thing, we have to plan."

"So what do we do?" Chastened, Dolphus stares down at the vampire-elf, who stares back out of eyes hot as hells.

Dolphus squats in the dust. He sees details. He sees how white its skin is, with fine blue lines running through it like a girl's naked thigh. He sees the lashes of its eyes and the shape of bones and muscles. It lies still, except for the rise of its breathing. Small movements run under the surface of its paunch, as if mice curl in there making the irregular sounds of digestion. Dolphus sees how tight the flesh is over its ribs and skull.

"It was starving," he says.

"Of course, what is there to drink out here? Why else did it risk drinking from the horse? There aren't many left now. They used to travel like us, with horses, they lived on blood from their horses, or stole it from cattle or sleeping drunks. Now they're dying of starvation."

"How is it," Dolphus leans down, smelling the bruised smell of it, "how is it no-one knew?"

He snorts, the old man who knew.

"They were rare and fast and clever. Even our folk hardly ever saw them, not when times were easier. This one's a fool."

The eyes blaze hotter and the thin face tugs around the wood of the gag in a grimace.

"No, he was starved," Dolphus says and sees the eyes flicker. "He'd have risked almost anything for a full belly."

When they lift it to its feet, Dolphus feels that its bones are thin and skin pliant and hot. It does not struggle, it stands swaying and pulls its chin back. It mouths the gag like a horse unaccustomed to the bit. Dolphus holds it while the old man releases its feet, then they heave it onto the horse and tie its ankles to the girth. As they begin to walk, it stares back over its shoulder at the barren land.

Dolphus likes the television, he enjoys loud music but he listens to other things as well. He remembers



Illustrations by Mike Hadley

a programme about an animal, a striped wolf-creature that wasn't a wolf, that lived or didn't live in Tasmania. It was supposed to be extinct but people kept reporting that they saw it for years and years. He can't quite recall the name. Another one had been about that ugly fish that had died out millions of years ago until some fishermen dragged it up in their nets and made the geologists change their minds. That was a coelacanth. The other name was similar. He frowns at his feet and watches the ground go past. Thylacine, that was the name. Coelacanth and thylacine, extinct yet not extinct, hiding away in the deep sea or the bush and defying the experts.

The vampire-elf sits uncomfortably on the horse, sagging in the saddle, hugging itself, it makes faint sounds in its throat. Sweat shimmers on its skin like oil. It urinates in a dark stream down the horse's side, adding the stink of a urinal to the discomforts of the day.

Feeling foolish, Dolphus waits until the old man goes to relieve himself and whispers: "Do you grant wishes like they say?" It stares at him with such obvious contempt that he reaches up and strikes it across the face. He catches the piece of wood painfully on the back of his hand and curses. It sits there and laughs at him, trussed like a helpless fowl at his mercy and yet it laughs! He grits his teeth and stares up at it, and understands that laughter is all it has left to fight him with.

They talk, wondering how they can make money from the thing now they have caught it. The old man wants to exhibit it like at an old-time fair, charging money, but Dolphus shakes his head. No-one will believe it is anything but a con, a fake teeth and make-up job, his kid brother trying to be a fairy. No way!

"You're behind the times," Dolphus says dismissively. "We want to get it on the television like those nature programmes. We ought to write to one of those scientists, David Bellamy or someone, tell them about it and charge them to film it. They might want to cut it up, I suppose. What sort of digestion would it have, to live on blood? We'd have to get the exclusive film rights. I know a good solicitor."

He realizes that the old man does not want the money. The hunt and the capture were all he needed; now he has lost interest. He had spoken of the money as a bait to get Dolphus out here, exactly as the horse's blood lured the vampire. Dolphus does not know what to do. He is a thief, a lifter of wallets and dealer in dubious goods, he does not know what to do with this legendary beast. He also fears that what they have done might be a major crime, the thing is too human. Are they guilty of kidnapping or assault? He has always carefully avoided attracting that much police attention. He is confused. His visions of money dissolve like candy-floss in a hot hand.

The horse is exhausted, it has lost much blood. They must give it extra water and allow it to amble. The heat-haze dances, dust films their skins and clothes. The vampire slithers on the horse's neck like a rag doll. They release it from the saddle and lay it on the ground, prepared for an attempt to escape, but when it moves, it shuffles itself away to lie in the dust, shivering spasmodically.

"What's wrong with it?" Dolphus demands.

"Heat stroke?" the old man suggests with a shrug. "They live at night, sleep during the day. Maybe it can't take the sun."

It is trying to rub the cords of its gag against a stone, slow feeble movements that only graze the skin of its face. Dolphus goes and kneels beside it. Its eyes do not focus on him, it no longer laughs. He grasps it by the hair and pulls up its head, forcing it to acknowledge him. It stares, and then it tips back its head, offering its throat, eyes shut. Dolphus places his hand just below its jaw. He can feel the corded tube of its windpipe and the pulse beating quick and hard on either side. It has exposed its helplessness to him, as if it expects him to drink its blood. Maybe that is how it would submit to others of its kind. He can smell the sour, stale sharpness of its urine. A single day of captivity has stripped it of any dignity. He thinks of thylacines and tigers, of cages and tethered animals. He looks up at the old man and says "Shit!" explosively. The old man watches without comment as he takes its thin wrist and tugs at the knot in the rope. He sees its vivid eyes open in narrow watchfulness and pretends not to notice. He pulls the rope away and it lies still, neither hindering nor helping as he yanks roughly at the gag.

It rises slowly to its feet. Dolphus backs away, wondering what the hell he has done. The old man watches silently. It stands in silence, it rubs briefly at its wrists, it presses a hand to its waist as if still discomforted by its distension. Then it leaps. It flickers from stillness to activity and, before Dolphus can even understand, it is back on the horse and its bare heels are drumming into the beast's side and the horse is cantering heavily away, sending up billowing dust-devils in its wake. Dolphus stands with his mouth open.

"Oh shit," he says eventually, and looks at the old man. They turn and begin to walk back to the town.

Sylvia M. Siddall first appeared in *Interzone* with a short story called "Kingfisher" (issue 30). She lives in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, and has recently finished a fantasy novel which is now in search of a publisher.

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Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

It must be so strange to be asked what you think of the film of your book. Imagine if you've just been subjected to your first sexual experience, and you roll over to find flashbulbs popping and a cassette machine thrust in your face: "Could you tell us what you thought of your partner's performance just then?" "How would you compare it to other acts of passion you've been involved with?" "Would you say the experience had been a satisfying one for you?" The bizarre thing is, you're not allowed to say No (author disowns movie! phones start nastily ringing) or even Mostly (author tries to distance self from film! phone calls ominously cease). But what can you say? "Well, inevitably, it's a different medium, so it's hard to judge, but Eddie Murphy is a man whose talents and judgment I very much respect, and I was happy to trust him with the necessary creative decisions on *Last Men in London*, and I think what's come out of it, though necessarily different from the book, is obviously a valid and interesting... Wait a minute, shouldn't those little reels be still going round?"

Well, this month's bemused-looking movie deflorate with the face full of microphones is our own dear Brian Aldiss, on celluloid at last after many a false start with **Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound***—which lands at a time when both sides of the collaboration have just unloaded agreeable volumes of memoirs, so the personal promo appearance is presumably obligatory. Actually, though, the sector most likely to feel disappointment at the product is the Corman fan-club, who will surely have expected something more obviously gleeful and poppy than this surprisingly low-key and literary subject with its unashamedly disjointed plot, perfunctory rationale, awkward poetic ending, and worryingly uneven effects. By rights, that should be the fans' problem, not the film's, given the master's lifelong disavowal of any grand auteurial talents, and his blissfully erratic directorial track record. (At twenty-five years' distance, we tend to remember the occasional *Masque of the Red Death* or *Little Shop of Horrors*, and too easily forget the rather less occasional *Haunted Palace*). All

the same, the project was largely bankrolled on impossible expectations that this modest, amiable, not always perfectly competent comeback has little interest or capacity to deliver.

One challenge, of course, that nobody could have foreseen even five years ago is the emergence of a whole genre of variously dippy follies about that same wild weekend on Lake

child's accent coach seems to have gone into voluntary exile after *Scandal*, and judged against Natasha Richardson and Alice Krige (to say nothing of Elsa Lanchester, who's simply not in competition) she looks considerably less like a precocious literary terrorist than Michael Hutchence looks like Lord Byron. (The interesting possibilities this raises for the casting



Raul Julia and Catherine Rabett in 'Frankenstein Unbound'

Geneva in 1816. Compared with Ken Russell's gibbering 1986 Gothic and the intellectual soft-focus of Ivan Passer's 1988 *Haunted Summer*, Aldiss's 1973 novel has vastly more interesting things to say about Mary Godwin, her dream, her book, her husband, and their Promethean visions of science's challenge to humanistic values. Now in fact Corman and his writers have respected a surprising amount of this in their adaptation—though inevitably the talky novel's wide-ranging conversations have to be collapsed down to sound-bite sloganizing, not all of it by any means bad ("I am a scientist," says the Baron: "I cannot sin.") But what the genre has left by way of invidious comparisons is a whole string of remarkably creditable performances in the role of *Frankenstein's* teenage creatrix, to which *Unbound's* Bridget Fonda is just painfully unequal. She has the one undeniable asset of being for once the right age, but the poor

of Claire Claremont are, alas, resisted.) This hole at the centre is particularly regrettable, because nearly everyone else is remarkably good. John Hurt gets more life into Aldiss's rather unfocused time-traveller hero than the novel really managed, the reliable Raul Julia is an extremely fine Baron, and the monster is just gorgeous, one of the most authentically tortured and Shelleyan yet seen.

Even so, it is, one can't but feel, a strange choice of Aldiss as well as of *Frankenstein*, and sometimes seems hesitant about what exactly it's got to offer as a film. More than most Aldiss, the novel was more of a fictional essay than a story, resting more on layers of image and ideas than on any conventional strength of narrative line. The rather mild plot—a 21st-century US politician thrust back by a man-made temporal apocalypse to an 1816 Switzerland enigmatically compounded of the historical universe of the Byron-

Shelley ménage and the fictional one of Victor Frankenstein – justified itself in the novel as a prop for some moving confrontations between the Promethean impulse in past, future, and (implicitly) present, as well as a passionate polemic on the history and value of sf itself. The first, though not the second, of these themes remains, with the Hurt character more directly implicated in the process of scientific hybris at beginning and end. A retired presidential adviser in the novel, in the film he becomes a military scientist, inventor of a weapon intended to end war that escapes to unravel the world; while the film's strange ending carries maker and monster a step further in their ballet of unending confrontation, to the point of discarding all pretence of conventional resolution and coherence along the way. But big themes alone don't deliver big grosses, and the inescapable tyranny of film form keeps supervening – from Fonda's delivery of simply the worst come-on line in costume-movie history (I can't quote it. I just can't. Sorry), to the unsalvageably naff death-by-weedy-lasers show-down. I think it does manage to preserve, just about, the idea that Frankenstein is a story about the difficulties of keeping science innocent, and that Mary Shelley was the prophet of this truth. For that alone it deserves our welcome. But it may be a little too unbound to play well in Omaha.



Catherine Rabett and Nick Brimble in 'Frankenstein Unbound' (Byron Films)

All the same, Aldiss gets off relatively lightly compared with the Schlöndorff-Pinter screenad of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. This is, I suppose, the book-to-movie answer to safe sex: strict on fidelity, relentlessly caring, and a little bit too obsessed with the traditional climax. Out go most of the novel's rather modest dislocations of time, the leisurely entrée to the handmaids' world and duties, and most of the incidents that advance texture rather than plot. In come a name and a considerably more active and spunky role for Atwood's quietist heroine, a load more bonking with the bit of rough over the garage, a clodhopping gore-puddled finale resolving everything that in the novel was left delicately unresolved, and a disastrously upbeat coda in the great tradition of the reshot ending to *Blade Runner*. These must have seemed to the chaps like tasteful, conservative compromises; in fact, they're appallingly destructive of much of the strength of the book. The plot is the pious product of relentless subtraction and elimination, where the Big Sister world offered ample scope for expansion. Even more than the novel, the film throws out tanatalizing shadows of ghastly conspiracies, betrayals and revelations that never materialize, with not a single character turning out to be anything other than they seem.

Compared with the emerging documentation of real secret states' activities, all this seems rather feebly imagined and tame.

And the same goes for the world. The visual texture, and most of the performances, are extraordinarily good. But though Gilead and its people look and perform uncannily like they read, stripping away most of the filtering subjectivity of Offred's first-person dictation simply lays bare the delicate daftness of Atwood's totalitarian-fundamentalist America, already a bit much for some readers' willing suspension. At a time when Western awareness of the mechanisms of this kind of ideological dystopia is higher than it ever was, there's a perfect opening to reclaim this rather lapsed genre from the deathclutch of all those dreary doomies from the early seventies. But it doesn't happen. It should feel like pre-revolutionary Romania; instead, it feels like *THX 1138*. I don't believe the fault lies, as the tidy solution would have it, with the fact that writer and director are notably short

in the ovary department – though it's curious that just about everything good about this movie, on and behind the screen, is provided by women. It's simply that, as in *Frankenstein Unbound*, first-person novels of emotions and ideas don't turn very naturally into cold celluloid narratives of action and incident.

Of course, you can always bite the bullet and involve the author. I have more patience than anyone I know with (God, this is like owning up to a crush on someone out of New Kids) Whitley Strieber, though I've got to say I found the second book pretty hard work. No, really: it would take more than bank-bursting royalties to persuade me to get up on nationwide chatshows and swear that little blue proctoes from another world had given me a good rogering with a robot trouser-hose, but that's frankly not the issue. What I really liked about *Communism* was a kind of old-fashioned Lovecraftian scariness I used to get from crappy Brad Steiger books read

late before bedtime, assuring me that there really were nameless things out there all around in the darkness just waiting to pounce on me in my pyjamas. When, aet. 13, I read Menzel's *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*, it was like losing Santa. I'd dreamed of being a man in black when I grey up, and handing out business cards reading "MR SMITH. The Government" that would mysteriously dissolve into smoke a day or two later. So much for the fancies of youth.

And then here's this sincere and utter case who actually believes he's been there. Doesn't that make you feel anything? In the book, I ate up the stuff about screen memories and the gradual recovery of awful glimpses of wall-to-wall nightmare in his past. I loved the way he employed every device in the repertoire to make it sound rational, even to the extent of stressing his own contradictions and giving serious consideration to the hypothesis that the wiring in his head had a few spare dangles. I adored the deft, steady evocation of what it would feel like for a sensible person to have to come to terms with the seemingly irrefutable memory of incomprehensible weird-outs. And the great thing about *Communism* the movie, as scripted by the man himself, is that it plays this stuff to the limit. Even more than the book, it pumps the presumption that Whitley Strieber is a totally rational, well-adjusted, and likeable person with an engaging sense of humour, scientist's zeal for truth, passionate scepticism about the daft and flaky, and exemplary frankness and integrity about his own beliefs. I'm in no position to judge any elements of this self-portrait, and I'm honestly not interested in finding out. It's a well-written, very well-played, and admirably ambivalent movie about a comfortable world-model creepily derailed, and is marred only by a tendency to take the job of writing a little too pompously (at the hem-hem encounter group: "Do the rest of you feel threatened by his profession?"), and an excess of bolting-upright-in-bed-sweating scenes. (Does anyone actually do this after a nightmare? It's like trying to remember the last time you actually said "Let's get out of here".) And I've no doubt at all that if anyone but Strieber had scripted it, it would have just been a joke. Of course, for some incorrigible wags, it still is. Shame on you, you big bullies. Go pick on Shirley Maclaine.

But the most extreme extension of scribble-to-screen authorial control (all right, maybe next to William Peter Blatty) has to be Otomo Katsuhiro's eye-boggling animation of his own manga epic *Akira* – surely the first movie where the author of the adapted work not only produces, writes, and directs, but actually storyboards every

image in detail from page to picture. A close adaptation of the first sixteen issues of the sprawling apocalyptic comic, it faithfully reproduces the baffling plotline and explosively escalating concept, while magnificently amplifying the amazing eruptive images that remain the comic's main strength long after the continuing storyline has disappeared into shambling randomness. It's probably the truest translation yet to screen of the comic serial experience, taking at least a couple of reels before it even starts to come together, and genuinely using the drawn medium to deliver effects unrealizable in another form.

In particular, it's the first film fully to appreciate the possibilities animation offers for gore and destruction on a truly volcanic scale, making the mightiest efforts of a Verhoeven look frankly wimpy. The character animation, as opposed to the background and effects, is only adequate; the plot (I shan't even try) offers plenty more quantity and pace than recognizable sense; and there are subtitles to muse on both in the translation ("The revolting soldiers arrested the Councillors") and in the content ("This city is saturated in all aspects like overripe fruit. It has its seeds inside it. So all we do is wait for the wind. The wind called AKIRA."). But the effects, backgrounds, and set pieces blow more or less everything else you've ever seen off the screen. Just totally unbound.

(Nick Lowe)

Tube Corn

TV Reviews by
Wendy Bradley

"The small town" is a uniquely American concept. Not that there are no small towns in the UK, of course, simply that they are not "small towns," only towns which happen not to be large. An English or Scottish or Welsh town can never be more than a bus ride, a horse ride, a longish walk away from another. We are a small country. The American "small town" is in the middle of nowhere, picket fences and porch swings, the town doctor and the town drunk, Huckleberry Finn and Pollyanna, *Bad Day at Black Rock* and *Back to the Future*, *Smallville* and *Twin Peaks*.

The small town is both a microcosm of American life and an unattainable ideal, an encapsulated community whose isolation can make it either a perfect vision of the past or, more likely, irrevocably stained by the sins of the inhabitants. It is a slice of what Americans think their society is like,

separated out from society by the prairie beyond the swinging sign that gives the town's name and population, just this side of Boot Hill. It comes as a visceral shock but no intellectual surprise when someone walks outside of the town boundaries and finds the town exists on a tabletop or is carved out of the world at the whim of a monster child or any of the other small-town scenarios we recognize from golden-age sf short stories.

So "Twin Peaks is different, a long way from the world." Indeed yes, but not that different. The picket fences stand in thin soil, a shaky foundation built over a pit. Even we Brits can recognize the idiom, so pervasive is our education in American cultural rituals.

What are we to make, then, of David Lynch's "Freudian Peyton Place," the "soap noir," the "postmodern" *Twin Peaks*? David Lynch, as we all know, is the man who murdered *Dune* (or "Doon" as the cast insisted on calling it) in the much-maligned film. I'm sure we all have our favourite scene – I go for Sting as Feyd-Rautha "I will kill you, Atreides" ("Not in those knickers, sunshine"). Lynch maintains he did not have final cut on *Dune*, ultimate control of how the scenes he had devised and shot were fitted together, and so perhaps we should give him the benefit of the doubt. Yet there was also *Eraserhead* which I have yet to manage to watch all the way through, as well as *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart*. On *Twin Peaks* the man who cornered the market in weird is working with Mark Frost, who was a writer and story editor on the late lamented *Hill Street Blues*, to produce a series which combines both their hallmarks, the perversity of *Blue Velvet* with the detail of *Hill Street*. *Twin Peaks* is apparently about the murder of a small town homecoming queen, Laura Palmer, but is in fact a record of the weirdness and horror lurking at the heart of the town and, by analogy, at the heart of America, of Life.

The "soap noir" label is unhelpful here, as *Twin Peaks* may use the conventions of soap opera but it is not "noir." Film noir was about a certain style, an attitude, an atmosphere that was dark both physically and morally, and *Twin Peaks* is dangerous because it has no morals, dark or otherwise. You knew Humphrey Bogart would in the end do the right thing, Rick had morals but they were hidden. Agent Cooper's morals? Sheriff Truman's? Who can guess with characters so deliberately weird.

The "postmodern" label again is of only slight relevance. The characters have resonances – Paul Atreides turned FBI agent investigates Tim's

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I
In the early evening she seemed better. She could not eat anything, but she said she would have a drink with him. He brought the glasses to her bedside and they talked. Not about anything important; there had been a lot of things he had thought of saying while she lay in drugged sleep, but they did not matter now. All that mattered was the two of them, together, continuing a dialogue of more than twenty years. They talked of the month they had spent the previous summer in the Orkneys, tramping through deserted bird-haunted islands. He escaped from the present into that fragment of their past and almost said "We must do it again," before remembering.

When pain once more whitened her face he gave her a shot, and went to the next room to call Grimond. Flickering lights within the sphere coalesced into a face. Grimond said:

"Mike... How is she?"

Starmer told him. Grimond nodded, and his figure receded and distorted as he crossed the room to his diagnostic console. Starmer watched him check the

dials which, over a distance of nearly fifty miles, recorded the data of her failing body – temperature, respiration, pulse rate, blood count and the rest – summed up and analyzed them. Back in close-up, Grimond said:

"I'll come over."

"How long?"

"Be with you in half an hour."

Impatiently Starmer said: "Katherine. How long does she have?"

"A few hours. It could be less."

"Don't come."

"But..."

"Is there anything you can do for her that I can't?"

"No. But you should have someone with you."

"I don't think so. And she'd know why."

"I can think up a reason."

"Nothing that would fool her. Thank you, John. It's late. Get some sleep."

From her bed, she asked: "Was that John?" Starmer nodded. "What does he say?"

"The same as always. We must be patient."

A Journey South

John Christopher

"You have been."

Their hands joined. The wasting was least apparent there: her fingers had always been thin. But they had also been strong, deft, lively, and now were barely capable of answering his gentle pressure. He saw her mouth twitch, and said:

"I'll give you another shot."

"No. It's all right. But..."

"What?"

Her grey eyes, so big in the shrunken face, engaged his.

"I'd like you to send for Martin."

"What do you want him for?"

She said, with an effort: "I want him."

"Perhaps in the morning."

The shake of her head seemed a visible draining of strength.

"Now. Please, darling. Now."

Martin wore his Counsellor's dress of crimson tunic and black cloak. Starmer resented that though realizing it made no difference: his

presence proclaimed his office. After a single look at Katherine, he wasted no time but moved into the ritual. The words were spoken, the responses made, and then it was time for the telling. Starmer wondered if he should leave, but neither said anything and he could not bear to go. She spoke in a low voice, counting beads of memory: names of people, places that had made up the warp and weft of her life. The ones he recognized were bad enough, but it was worse hearing those others in which he had had no part. So much of her life he had not shared, and now never could.

Then the reconciliation. Listening out of a fog of misery, Starmer acknowledged Martin did it well.

"Before the beginning of years

There came to the making of man

Time with a gift of tears,

Grief with a glass that ran.

Pleasure with pain for leaven,

Summer with flowers that fell..."

She listened with closed eyes. Perhaps the words did work magic for her, some kind of hope or healing.

"To every thing there is a season,

and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die."

There was no magic for Starmer. He thought of another scrap of old verse, and wanted to shout it:

"Do not go gentle...rage, rage against the dying of the light..."

But that was not in the ritual. The last duty of a Counsellor was the bringing of peace, acceptance, resignation. He forced himself to keep silence. This had to be endured because she had required it. Soon it would be over, and they would be together again, and alone, if only for a brief time. And every second of that time was worth a day, a year, of the stunted life that waited for him, so near and so unwanted.

Then in mid passage Martin checked. Starmer saw her gaze was fixed.

"Rest in peace, sister," Martin said.

"Don't be a fool!" Starmer said. "She's not dead."

Martin made the farewell gesture. He said gently:

"She's dead, Michael."

He saw it was true. He had always prided himself on a stoical acceptance of realities, and knew he must accept this too. The overwhelming bitterness lay in being cheated of that little time together, those minutes he had counted on. He said:

"At the end...she was looking at you, not me."

"Close her eyes," Martin said.

Her flesh was warm to his fingers. When he had done it he looked down at her in silence. Martin said:

"Go to bed. A pill – two. Three maybe. Leave everything to me."

"No." With an effort, he looked at the Counsellor. "You can go now."

"It's finished," Martin said. "There's a body there, that's all. There are necessary things to do, and I'm accustomed to them."

"I'll see to it. Everything."

"It's not usual. Or wise."

"Leave us."

Martin shrugged. "If you wish. I'll return in the morning."

"No. I don't want you. Or anyone."

"Your neighbours will want to come."

"No-one. Tell them no-one."

"Her friends have a right to mourn her."

"I'm not stopping them."

"In company; with you. Grief needs expression, and is best shared. That has always been understood. And there's a grave to be dug."

"I'll dig it."

"It is the custom..."

"Customs are not laws. Are they?"

"No. But you need help."

"I'll be judge of that."

Martin shrugged. "I'll arrange to have a digger sent."

"Not necessary."

"There must be a burial, you know. That is the law. Burial or incineration."

"I'll bury her."

"Without a digger?"

"Yes."

"That won't be easy. You're not a young man."

"I'll dig the grave," Starmer said. "And to the regulation depth. Leave me now."

"We must talk some time."

"Some time."

"Call me if you want help."

"Yes. If I want help, I'll call you."

At university, when those of his year had chosen to be administrators, artists, scientists, doctors, counsellors, Starmer had elected to be a gardener. It was a minority activity, and even in that small field the course he followed was not orthodox. He did not join with others in the communes that created and tended the great gardens which people travelled across seas and continents to admire; nor did he, as was usual with those who preferred to work on their own, move on from garden to garden, seeking the countless forms of perfection. He created a single garden, over long years.

The garden itself, neither formal nor studiously informal, belonged to no recognized school and in various ways was defiant of all of them. The house stood on a knoll with woods behind it, and its grounds descended, in erratic sweeps, to the meadowed river which fed the lower water garden. From the air, generally regarded as a crucial test, the whole thing looked awkward and chaotic, not so much unplanned as badly planned. From within though it had a pattern which was known to him.

As it had been to Katherine. He did not have to spend long looking for the spot in which to bury her. There was a point, a hundred yards or so below the house, to which the eye was drawn – from below and either side as well as from above. He took a spade and dug there.

It was hard work. He had used power tools less than most, but this was grinding monotonous labour. The sun stung the salt sweat on his skin, and then, since it was an English May, sunshine gave way to heavy clouds and driving rain. In the middle of the day he rested, drank beer and ate bread and cheese; then dug again. It was late afternoon when he finished. He brought out her body, weighing so little in its silk winding sheet, and laid it on the sling he had rigged up over the grave. The rain had stopped but the day was dark, the sky thick with ragged cloud. He let go the straps, easing her body slowly into the raw gash of earth. For a moment, as he looked at the little mound of white silk, his mind traced remembered contours.

He said: "Goodbye, my love."

Then, delaying no longer, he shovelled in soil. It was not so bad once the last trace of white had gone.

The Bird glided down to fold its wings in front of the house, and Martin unclipped his harness and stepped out. Today he was in everyday dress, a blue and white tunic suit. Starmer did not go out to greet him. Martin pulled the rope which jangled the visitor's bell and since no sign forbade entry came inside.

He asked: "How are you, Michael?"

"I'm all right."

"You didn't call me."

"No."

"So I thought I'd come and see you." He was smiling; Starmer said nothing. "I was wondering what you were planning to do."

"I'm not sure yet."

"I recommend a holiday."

"Yes."

"And preferably not a solitary one." Starmer again made no response. "You need people."

"Do I?"

"Look in that mirror. Four days, and you haven't shaved. I don't think you've washed, have you? Or eaten anything but scraps."

He stayed silent. Martin said:

"Do you mind if I sit down? And pour myself a drink?"

"No, I don't mind."

"One for you?"

"For therapeutic reasons?"

Martin laughed. "If a reason's needed." He poured stiff whiskies for both of them. Sipping, he said: "Peatier than I'm used to, but I like it. How many bottles have you got through in those four days?"

"I haven't counted. Is it important?"

"No. Your one sensible reaction, in fact. But you would have done better to let friends drink with you."

Starmer made a small gesture of rejection; he was still standing by the window. Martin eased back into the chair, which flattened under him.

"Barricading yourself with isolation can only make things worse. You need people, as I say. Trite, but true. Everyone does in bereavement, but you more than most. I see your sphere has been disconnected."

"People called me. There was nothing I wanted to say. Or could say."

"Some got through to me, as your Counsellor. I thanked them and made excuses for you."

"Good of you."

"She was much loved."

"Yes. By me, also."

"And you yourself have many friends who would like to help. One or two surprised me. I didn't know you knew Leoni."

"We were at university together."

"A great man. The finest of the authenticators. His Roman Triumph last year... magnificent."

Starmer nodded. "He's very talented."

"And, it seems, fond of you. He wants you to stay with him, in Sicily. I think you should go. It will do you good."

"I'll give it thought."

There was a pause before Martin said: "I couldn't help noticing the garden as I flew in. You've had a pretty good shot at destroying it."

Starmer had spent most of a day with a flame thrower, watching flowers and grass and trees, everywhere except in the clearing in which she was buried, burn to ash. He said:

"I made it for her."

"Yes, I understand that. And, of course, you're entitled to do what you like with your property. But I've been talking to John Grimond, Michael; and I must tell you that in his view you could be on the edge of a collapse, and a severe one. I think it would be a good idea to accept Leoni's invitation."

His voice was measured. It was close to being a formal warning. Humanity was freer than ever before in history, but there were limits. Physician and Counsellor could, by mutual agreement, make an order for restraint; and under restraint there was the possibility, as a last resort, of chemical reorientation. And he was tired. After a pause, he said:

"In that case I'll accept."

"Good. Shall I make you an airship booking?"

"No. I'll bird."

"It's a long way. Over a thousand miles."

"Does it matter? I'm not in a hurry."

Martin looked at him for a moment before giving his professional acquiescing smile.

"No, I don't suppose it does."

II

Starmer spent some hours checking and repairing his Bird. He had burnt Katherine's when he destroyed the garden, and a wing of his own had been scorched. The safety system made the controls inoperable unless every part was sound; there was a way of getting round that but it would have taken longer than the repair. He worked in feverish haste. Suddenly he felt a need to be away.

He was ready by early afternoon. He had re-connected his sphere, but no-one had called. They could have forgotten about him, or Martin could have warned them off. He put a call through to Leoni, and got a young girl who said he was out for the day; he left a message with her.

After checking there was food and drink in the pouches, he climbed in and harnessed himself. The wings unfolded and flapped, slowly at first then faster, their whirr drowning the subdued hum of the motor. In an eddying cloud of dust and ash the Bird headed south, down wind.

At a few hundred feet Starmer levelled off, throttling the wing-beat back to the rhythm of steady flight. The afternoon was warm, the sky clear, but there were mare's tails on the horizon. He passed over familiar landmarks – the Henderson farm, Grimond's house with its weird conical tower, the irregular silver line of the Thame. Oxford's spires drowsed in the west, tiny under rippling haze.

He followed the valley between the two ranges of the Chilterns, flapping steadily across the plain southwards to the Hampshire Downs. There was little traffic: only one other Bird in hailing distance, and a distant glimpse of an airship chugging east.

The weather started to deteriorate, with a cloud mass moving in fast from the south-west. The wind freshened, and he increased power as he flew into it. He was buffeted by gusts, at times quite roughly. Additionally he felt the need to relieve his bladder and, though he was wearing a bottle, decided to land. He came down in a field on the edge of a deserted town – from the air a pattern of rectangles just visible through the conquering brush. It would have been a workman's town of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, built to serve the railway, whose crumbling embankment still stretched away north and south.

When he had stretched his legs, Starmer made himself a sandwich and a hot drink. He tipped plastophage on the containers and watched as they crumbled into dust. The cloud cover had brought early dusk; by sensible standards it was too late for a Channel crossing. He ought to spend the night here in his tent, or look for hospitality nearby – he had seen a house a couple of miles back. But numbness and lethargy had been altogether replaced by restlessness. He got back into the Bird and flapped away, over the ruins of Southampton and a stretch of the New Forest

that offered a glimpse of deer, or maybe ponies; and so across water towards the jagged teeth of the Needles. After that the grey white-crested sea stretched into a darkening horizon.

Rain came, gusts slashing against the visor and momentarily blinding him. He knew he should show navigation lights, but did not bother to switch them on. He could not believe another Bird would be out in this weather; even the airships would have put in to their nearest havens. The rain found chinks in his flying suit, gradually soaking him. He did not mind, welcomed it rather.

Without navigation lights his instrument panel was dark. The sudden sight of a rearing wave, no more than feet below, shocked him. Instinctively he adjusted elevators and increased power, and the Bird lifted.

He wondered about that automatic response. He had told himself there was no point in going on living, and he knew it to be true. It was his body that had acted, against the judgement of the mind, intent on saving its pointless self. But the function of mind was to control body. He had only to cut the motor to drift down, wind tossed, to the welcoming waste of water.

His fingers caressed the switch, but did not pull it. He considered that, abstractly. Physical cowardice again? He did not think so. Whether or not perfect love cast out fear, weariness did. There was simply a feeling: not here, not now. It was, he knew, irrational, but his rational mind accepted it. He switched on lights and increased power, heading south.

More than an hour later the altimeter digits changed from blue to red, indicating earth below. He came down to a view of swishing tree tops in his landing beam, and eventually put down in a field of long dank grass. He stripped off his flying suit and slid his wet body into the tent. It ballooned above and inflated gently beneath him; its glowing warmth dried and soothed him.

He thought about Katherine, as he had done every night since she died. But tiredness was stronger than memory too; soon he slept.

In the morning the weather was still unsettled, but the wind had dropped. He birded south-east over country that was mostly wooded, with patches of cultivated ground. Towards evening another Bird rose beneath him. It seemed to have come from nowhere until he saw the inconspicuous green ramp emerging from a meadow, and realized he had been flying over a factory. The Bird came alongside, matching his height and speed, and the rider hailed him above the flapping of wings. When he responded, the voice called:

"You are English?"

"Yes."

"A long way from home."

"That's true."

"Where do you sleep tonight?"

"I have no plans."

"You must stay with us."

To refuse an offer of hospitality without a compelling reason was unthinkable. Starmer took up position on his right rear. Passing over a broad tranquil river they dropped to a house surrounded by an orchard, the lines of trees glimmering white with blossom in the dusk. The house was modern, its basic

beehive shape broken at irregular heights and intervals by little jutting balconies. There were many windows, all glowing with light. The Frenchman came up as Starmer was unstrapping his harness.

"I am Jacques Prideau. And this is my wife, Madeleine, who comes to greet us."

Starmer introduced himself and they shook hands. Prideau was in his early thirties, a tall dark man who moved restlessly. His wife was slow-moving, golden-haired, possibly a few years older. Prideau put an arm across her shoulders as they went in, and she leaned briefly against him.

As in all beehives the main living area occupied the large central space under the transparent roof, with other rooms in tiers around it. The living room had a homely look, its tidiness plainly due to constant attention rather than fastidious use. One of the first things that caught Starmer's eye was a rocking horse. He said, to Madeleine:

"You have a child?"

She smiled, at him but more at her husband. "Two. Two boys. We are – *fécond*. Prolific?"

"And where are my sons," Prideau asked, "that they do not greet me?"

"You kept them up so late last night with the construction set that they needed little urging towards bed this evening." She explained, to Starmer: "It was Pierre's birthday yesterday, his seventh."

"It is a construction set of a new kind," Prideau said. "Do you know of it? The parts bond permanently except that the bond dissolves from the application of a magnetic stylo. No good for building houses, in case an airship flies low and its motor decomposes the walls, but excellent for a toy."

Starmer felt uneasy, obscurely troubled. The evidence of their mutual physical affection was possibly responsible. Madeleine in no way reminded him of Katherine, but she was a woman, Prideau's woman. They had what he had lost, and the bonus of two small boys asleep in an upper room. No dissolving stylo threatened this house. Death's comet was still light years away, its annihilating blaze no more than a smudge above the horizon. Was it their happiness that disturbed him, he wondered, or their complacency?

As the evening wore on though he found himself soothed by her slow ease, Prideau's livelier garrulousness. Prideau talked of technical matters: his interests were wide, his enthusiasm infectious. Most of it was strange to Starmer – his life with Katherine had been concerned with books, music, plants – and he was surprised to find how much he understood.

Madeleine left them at eleven, saying she needed more sleep than Jacques. She urged her husband not to keep their guest talking too late. Prideau asked, perfunctorily:

"You are not tired?"

"Not a bit."

Surprisingly it was true. (And perhaps, he thought, he was glad not to see them go off together to the waiting bed). He asked a question about a technique Prideau had been describing for tracking reindeer on their Lapland migrations; and Prideau eagerly obliged. It was nearly two before they broke up. Starmer was a little drunk by then – Prideau, who had been liberally pouring cognac, apparently had

an iron head – and he slid thankfully into the cocoon of his bed.

When he awoke sunlight was strong through the canted windows, but it was not that which had wakened him. He looked and saw the children at his bedside, one of them stretching out a hand to pluck a second time at his shoulder.

The other carried tea on a tray. Starmer thanked them in inadequate French, and they talked. The bigger boy was Pierre, he of the seventh birthday; Antoine would be six in the autumn. They had Jacques' aquiline features and Madeleine's colouring, but were even blonder; the younger boy's fine hair was almost silvery.

Their mother had permitted them to bring the tea, which Englishmen always drank, because he was the first Englishman they had met. Was it true that in England forests were denser than those in France, with bears and wolves roaming through them?

Starmer said he did not think there were wolves. Bears yes, in the New Forest at least. It was thought they had been turned loose from one of the last of the travelling circuses. They asked what circuses were, and he told them; and about zoos. There had been a time when people kept animals in cages and trained them to do unnatural things. They listened with grave attention.

Looking at their sunlit heads, Starmer thought there could have been bitterness in this also – a reminder of an older sadness. Originally they had hoped for children. He felt a calm melancholy and thought perhaps it was getting easier; then thought how much Katherine would have loved talking to them, and it was as bad as it had ever been. He hid his pain from the children in pointless talk.

Prideau insisted on Starmer birding to the factory with him before travelling on. It was the European plant for hand-torch production, fully automated and controlled by half a dozen supervisors; in an emergency a single individual could handle everything. Prideau had a personal workshop there; he showed Starmer his tools and equipment, displaying them with loving hands.

It was some time before Starmer got away. He thanked Prideau for the hospitality. Prideau shrugged.

"Our life is quiet. It is good to have someone to talk with. Should you come this way again..."

"I'll be sure to visit you, certainly. But it's not likely."

"We will hope for it. Or perhaps I will travel to England." He smiled. "But that also is unlikely. I do not have much urge to leave my own small corner."

"I can understand that," Starmer said.

III

Dijon was off his route, but it seemed a good place for buying presents. He had heard it was a busier town than most and this proved true. Derelict areas had been turned into parks, but the centre had dozens of shops, some quite large. He wandered there for a couple of hours and was extravagant over the presents, getting a miniature diamond lathe for Jacques, a silk Kashmiri shawl for Madeleine, and for the boys a toy authenticator, programmed for the battle of Austerlitz.



In the afternoon, heading east towards the Jura, his path was crossed by wild geese flying north to the Scandinavian summer. They were high up, for a time darkening the sky; he fancied he could hear the beat of myriad wings above the flapping of the Bird. Below, lazy rivers wound through fields and woodlands.

He climbed to cross the first range of mountains, and stayed high over the lakes. All cloud had vanished; he advanced through a sky of deep blue towards the splendid white barrier of the Alps, dazzling in late sunshine. He was alone now with nothing – neither bird nor Bird – in sight. A thin thread of smoke rose from a farmhouse chimney, fixed in the still air.

Lake Geneva came into view on his right. A tiny speck must be the solitary lake ferry the Swiss still ran. He thought of dropping down to where the vines would be putting out green buds and the meadows preparing to turn white with narcissi. They had spent a spring day there once, and made love on a pine-sheltered spur of rock which looked thousands of feet up to glistening peaks and as far down to the valley's shadowy floor. Between Heaven and Hell, she had said; after they came out of ecstasy into laughter, at the sight of a chamois gravely inspecting them from the next spur.

No, not there.

He reached snow at the Diablerets, tired now and not relishing the thought of crossing this white desert towards the Ticino valley, where he had intended to spend the night. There was a village, a cluster of chalets and a painted wooden church, on the slope that faced the glacier. He dipped the Bird's wings towards it.

Hans said: "A man must come to his middle years before he truly learns to count his blessings. We live in a golden age."

"I do not dispute that," Rudi said. "It is the future about which I am concerned. If our population continues to grow less..."

"To count his blessings," Hans repeated, "and to trust in the providence of God. Would you wish to return to a time when even this land was soiled by the droppings of mass-man? How long did it take to clean our lakes of pollution?"

"But the declining birth-rate..."

"A temporary pause. And the decline has halted."

"It has reached a plateau. There have been such before."

"Michael here was last night in a house with two sons under seven. Two!"

"Statistically that means nothing. There are families with three children, even four. But very few."

They were sitting after supper in the living room which was full of clumsy comfortable furniture, its walls hung with pictures of ancestors and mountains. Familiarity with their high peaks could never breed contempt in the Swiss; they loved them like members of their family.

Hans was in his sixties, spare and red-faced with thinning white hair. His son-in-law Rudi was a fleshier man of about thirty-five, with a square Germanic face. The women were Rudi's wife, Hilde, and his daughter, Maria. The mother displayed the residue of a strong beauty which the daughter still

fully enjoyed. She would be around thirty, Starmer judged.

This was the largest chalet in the village, a three-storied building with long balconies bright with flower boxes, and a date, 1825, carved above the door. Supper had been simple – peasant's soup, cheese fondue and a marzipan pudding – but ample and sustaining. Now they sat round the table, with coffee and a flask of kirsch.

"We live in a wonderful world," Hans said. "So much is being done, so many parts of the Creator's design being rescued from extinction. The dodo and the passenger pigeon were lost, but hundreds of other species have been saved. The blue whale roams the seas in safety."

Rudi said: "And you see the hand of God in this?"

"What else? Mankind was on course for perdition, taking the rest of creation with him. Now there is room to breathe, for all manner of things. And with the filth has gone the violence. This is the land in which Servetus, the great pioneer of medicine, was burnt at the stake for heresy. Once these valleys were red with blood, spilled in God's name. Now we live at peace, with one another and with ourselves."

Rudi said: "Mankind is better, I agree, for being numbered in millions rather than billions. But our numbers could become too few."

"Be thankful," Hans said, "and have faith. More coffee, Michael?"

Starmer shook his head. "I shan't sleep if I do."

"You will, in our mountain air! Throughout the world the atmosphere is purer than it was, but ours is the most pure. And a glass of kirsch will balance out the coffee. Then we will all go to bed. Rising early, we do not stay up late." He smiled. "What others see as dullness we count as virtue."

They persuaded him not to travel onwards the following day. Hans was eager to show him their mountains at closer range, and Starmer birded with him and Rudi among the peaks. They lunched at a café in Grindelwald, below the grim north face of the Eiger. As at Dijon, much of the town had been razed, though here not made into parks but turned back to pasture. Starmer thought of it as it had once been, with tarmac roads filled, bumper to bumper, by evil-smelling vehicles. Now what roads remained were little more than tracks. Cows with drowsily tinkling bells grazed meadows where occasional irregular mounds marked the site of old buildings.

They returned without Rudi who was flying east to look at cattle and would spend the night away. Starmer and he shook hands before parting.

"A good journey south," Rudi said. He grinned at the older man. "Do not let him talk you into the ground tonight. When he finds a new audience he exploits it without mercy!"

It was an accurate prophecy. After supper, Hans held the floor again. Starmer was content to let him talk – chiefly about his beloved country, for him a topic of unending interest, and his family. His ancestors had lived in this valley for six generations. They had been here before the horrors of the twentieth century, and were here still. It was a good record, under the hand of God.

A record, Starmer refrained from pointing out, whose end was plainly in view. Rudi and Maria had been married ten years, and there were no children.

Later Hans spoke of the final throes of the overpopulated world which his grandfather had described to him as a boy: a world crammed with old people crippled by illness or dementia; or merely by age's ordinary incapacities. His grandfather had been able to remember the passing of the law permitting euthanasia. Some religious leaders had condemned it as an impiety. Now it could be seen for what it was – the realistic and appropriate way of dealing with an otherwise insurmountable crisis. And an act of mercy, since, with fewer hands to tend more and more who needed help, the old would otherwise have been abandoned to die in misery.

Emergencies created special needs. With the balance of generations restored, the voluntary ending of human life could be recognized once more as an anti-social act.

Starmer asked: "Why anti-social?"

"Because we have duties, to others as well as ourselves."

"That's an argument against euthanasia in youth or early manhood. Not after a life's work has been completed. Surely one is free then of obligations."

Hans shook his head. "Never free. There is always a debt. One leaves things that others must do – affairs to be cleared up, a body to be buried. And one leaves the unhappy legacy of mourning."

Starmer said nothing. Hans pursued it.

"Do you not agree?"

He said neutrally: "Perhaps you're right."

Hans smiled. "I have tired you with my talking! We will go to bed. Blessed sleep, followed by a new day. Life is good. Each day dawns well."

Starmer left the curtains undrawn; when he put out the lamp, moonlight silvered the room. Blessed sleep indeed, he thought, and an end, if only temporarily, to memories.

He was drowsing but the light tap pulled him back to wakefulness. The door opened and Maria was there. She wore a white housegown, fastened high at the neck. She said:

"I wondered how you were."

"All right."

She looked at him for a while without speaking; then said:

"You are our welcome guest, and one does not ask questions of a guest. But we talked about you last night, Rudi and I. He thought you had a sadness. He has an eye for sadness."

He shook his head. "No. But thank you for being concerned."

She nodded, smiling. "I am glad. Good night, then."

Suddenly he had a fear of being alone.

"Stay awhile." She looked at him in silence again. "I'd like to talk."

"About what?"

"About you. Tell me about yourself."

She shook her head. "That would be dull. I am not interesting."

He thought: that is what I want – dullness, and company. Something, someone, who is simply there, alive, but making no demand or claim, offering no

involvement. He said:

"Tell me."

She came over and sat on the foot of the bed; it creaked under her weight.

"Where shall I start?"

"Anywhere. From when you were a child."

"I was born here, as you know. The glacier is the first thing I remember: a day of storm, rain and tumbling clouds, then clearing – blue sky, and the whiteness below it. I was three perhaps, or four."

In the moonlight he saw her frown slightly, with the effort of recollection.

"Other things from that summer too. A fall on the steps outside. I cut my knee on a sharp stone: I have the scar still. A doll I lost. And the finding of it, weeks later, which was worse than the losing. She was bleached by rain and sun, a dead thing."

It was going wrong. Hearing her talk of these simple unimportant things made him aware of her individuality, her uniqueness. It unsettled him. Yet he did not want her to stop. She talked on quietly, but the trivia of her life which he had thought might be salve to his wound were salt instead. In the middle of speaking about a cat that had gone wild, only coming back to raid the kitchen when the valley's supply of small game gave out, she stopped. In a questioning voice, she said:

"Michael?"

Only then was he aware that his eyes were running with tears. He rubbed his cheek with his hand.

"I'm sorry."

She got up and came towards him. Taking a handkerchief from the pocket of the housegown, she dabbed his face.

"Do not be sorry. But tell me. It will be better if you do."

He did not think it would, but found himself talking all the same – about Katherine, the garden, the grave. She leaned over him, her hands holding one of his, gently pressing from time to time. When he had exhausted himself and fell silent, she said:

"Is it better?"

He did not answer. She stood up. He thought she was going to leave him and the pang of fear came back. But she was looking at him, her face serious and intent; and he saw her fingers move to the fastener at the neck of the gown. A line opened and extended, and underneath she was naked.

Stepping out of the gown, she opened the sheets and climbed in beside him. He found himself shaking with a different fear.

"It's no good."

"Hush," she said. "It will be."

Her hands held and caressed, her lips brushed face and chest. He saw the white line of the parting in her hair, and its scent was in his nostrils. Brown eyes were close to his. He said again:

"No good."

She smiled with confidence.

"Love me, and be at peace."

He could see one of her feet in the moonlight that fell across the end of the bed: shapely and strong, with the strength of her peasant ancestors. Now he would have wept, but could not. He stared dry-eyed at the ceiling; self-disgust was a

choking lump in his throat. She said:

"You are trembling. Are you cold?"

When he failed to answer she got up and rearranged the bed clothes to cover him. Her drooping breasts brushed the sheet as she smoothed it. He said, for the sake of saying something, anything:

"You're beautiful."

She smiled. "I am pleased you think so."

He turned away, unable to bear the encounter of eyes.

"What is it, Michael?"

"Nothing."

One fist was clenched against his face; she opened it with her fingers and stroked his hand.

"You have good hands. I like men's hands that bear the marks of labour."

"These hands buried her. A week ago."

"She would have been glad of it, I think."

"And now betray her."

"Betray?" He was silent. "How does one betray the dead?"

"As one betrays the living. By breaking faith." He paused. "As you have betrayed Rudi."

Her hand did not let go of his. "But no faith is broken. Rudi knows, and approves."

"Of your coming to my bed?"

"Of course. That is why he persuaded you to stay a second night, and found a reason to be absent himself. He knew you were unhappy, and lonely. He wished me to comfort you, in the best way comfort can be given."

"Comfort," he said. "Is that all it means to you?"

"Comfort, companionship, pleasure." Her hand took his face and turned it towards hers. "Michael, have you been with no other woman but your wife?"

"Since our marriage, no."

"And she? No other man?"

"I don't know." He closed his eyes, trying to blot out present and past alike. "I never knew."

IV

Starmer crossed the Alps in good weather. A high pressure belt was reported stable and likely to persist for some time. He should be able to reach Sicily comfortably in three days.

He stopped the night at Viareggio, and set off the following morning with the intention of pressing on to Rome. Siena entered his mind only to be dismissed. If the shores of Geneva had been too threatening with their memories, how could he possibly bear that?

And yet, perversely, the thought returned. Away to his left stretched the Tuscan hills; rounded, bright green with summer, columned with cypresses. The day was beginning to haze over with heat. He passed over Pisa, the cathedral and broken fragments of the tower splotches of white in a mass of emerald. And almost without being aware of what he was doing he turned the Bird east, to follow the dark streak of the Arno.

A thinner thread branched southwards: the Elsa. Starmer went with it, descending now through the warm air. He could smell the land, the unforgettable scented breath of Italy. He crossed a hill at the valley's end and saw the city, red and ochre against reseda.

He could still overfly; but as he birded lower the roofs parted to show the Piazza del Campo and the

slim dominating column of the Torre del Mangio. They drew him irresistibly, and he dropped towards them.

The city had recently opened for its season and there were a few people about. Lunch was being served at the café at the top of the Piazza, and he shared a table with an American who asked him if he had been here before. Starmer said yes, though not for a long time.

"I come every summer. The world's most perfect city, by my reckoning. And don't they keep it in wonderful shape? Just think of it – the entire centre retained just the way it was. And totally unoccupied for half the year."

"Not totally."

"Well, I suppose some of the preservation boys come here. I meant, by visitors."

"It's possible to visit."

"The hotel closes."

"The Custodian will put you up, if you make a special request. We stayed with him."

"In winter?"

"Yes. We had good weather. Cold, but clear."

"I might try it some time. Except it's a long way to come to Europe, in winter."

Starmer nodded. "A long way."

He walked alone through empty streets, climbing the hill to the cathedral but not going inside. Instead he went to the Museo dell'Opera and upstairs to the Duccio room. The room was empty too, and heavy with a silence that the tiny mumble of the conditioner only emphasized.

Nothing had changed. The paintings hung where they had twenty years ago, and for more than a century before that. He stood before the Mesta, with its concourse of saints clustered round the central figure of the Virgin. All that gold, and those flowers of faces framed by their slender haloes. Flesh showed green where pigmentation had been lost, and you could see the specking of worm-holes. For nearly seven centuries after Duccio painted it, it had crumbled little by little. Since then, a halt to deterioration. A man viewing it not just seven centuries but seven millennia hence would find no further change. If any man were left to look.

He heard the footsteps, but only turned when the voice spoke close behind him.

"Bellissima. Non è vero?"

Starmer said: "And she still has you to watch over her, Carlo."

Recognition took a moment. When it came, the remembered grin transformed Traporti's hatchet face.

"Michael! After so long. And Katherine – she is with you?"

"No. Katherine's dead."

Traporti put a hand on his shoulder. "That is hard to believe." He shook his head. "My Pia is also dead, three years since. But Katherine was so much younger."

"You're still Custodian?"

"Yes. It is what I am used to, the work and the city. Are you staying at the Continentale?"

"I only birded in a couple of hours ago. I hadn't decided about staying."

"But you must! With me. You cannot rush away after so long."

"No," Starmer said. "I suppose I can't."

Traporti had kept the same apartment, looking down over the piazza, in a building otherwise unoccupied and sealed. An elevator took them to the fourth floor and a vestibule still filled with exotic potted plants. That had been Pia's hobby; presumably Traporti had continued it.

Starmer had been trying to recall Pia's appearance but could not bring her to mind. In the living room, though, there was a high-relief print which he studied while Traporti was getting them drinks. It was not that she had not been distinctive, with a dark oval face recalling Duccio's Virgin. She was Sienese by ancestry, he remembered, and had brought Traporti here from his home in the Po valley. Yes, certainly distinctive. Strange that, forgetting her so completely, he had recognized Traporti instantly.

"Campari, extra touch of bitters, ice and soda, twist of orange. How is that?"

No, not really strange. He nodded.

"Perfect."

"That month we had, the four of us. I remember it well. I hoped we might meet again."

He shrugged. Starmer remembered too: the calls Traporti had made to them afterwards, his own bleak responses and the Italian's gradual awareness of their being unwelcome. And Katherine's protests, into which he had read so many things, and the eventual silence into which he read still more. With a desolation of insight, he thought: what a bastard I was. And yet, despite that, despite death and grief, the question remained and he hungered for an answer.

Traporti talked without prompting of his life. It was a full one in summer, with the tourists, the hotel and two restaurants, shops, Bird-servicing station, information centre. In the winter it was quieter, but he found enough to occupy him. He hunted still. His eye was not what it had been, but on the other hand game was more plentiful every year.

"My freezer is well stocked," he said. "Tonight I shall make you an *arrosto misto della caccia*. You remember? With a Montepulciano wine."

Starmer went to the window. The piazza was pink and white in sunlight, its stones quivering with heat, the tower standing phallic guard. Once the air had echoed with the cries of Ghibelline and Guelph, in that long struggle against Florence during which the Sienese began building a cathedral to outshine all in Christendom, to the glory of God and the City of the Wolf. Until the Black Death came, putting an end both to the patriotic struggle and religious ambition. Yet for centuries after that the city had gone on living, with generations being born, begetting, giving way to new.

He called back to Traporti: "Wasn't there talk of reviving the Palio? Nothing came of it?"

"No. And it would have been wrong. Preserving buildings is one thing, resurrecting a horse race quite another. The Palio belongs to the past. It is best left to the authenticators."

They sat over the dinner table, against a window, as dusk enfolded the city. They were well down the second bottle of wine. Traporti asked:

"If I had not found you in the Museo, would you have looked for me?"



Starmer paused before answering, truthfully: "I don't know."

"Perhaps providence directed my steps. I visit my Duccios often, but not every day. It is more than a week since I was there last."

Starmer stared out silently. The air was full of swallows, clouds of them sweeping round in their final mass flight before settling for the night. A single figure walked down the slope of the piazza and two others, male and female, stood close together by the fountain. The tower was sharp-edged against a purpling sky that held a single star. Water sparkled, gushing from the wolf's stone mouth into the basin where a late loitering pigeon fluffed its feathers.

"So beautiful," Traporti said.

"Yes."

"A beauty of which one does not tire. And to share it is to enjoy it the more. I miss Pia most at such a time as this, when we sat together at the day's end. It has been longer for me than you, of course. One grows accustomed. But to some things, never."

Starmer sipped his wine. Undeniably there was peace here, for anyone with the will to claim it.

Traporti said: "You are a young man still, Michael. To me, at least. What will you do with your life?"

"I haven't decided."

"Go back to your garden?"

"I destroyed it, before I left."

"You could make another?"

"I suppose so."

When, after a pause, Traporti spoke again, it was in a more earnest tone. "Listen, Michael. Why not stay with me? We have each lost life's companion. It would be a help perhaps for both of us."

"Thank you. But I don't think I could do that."

"As well as this apartment I have my villa outside the city. You could make an English garden, here in Tuscany."

"No."

"At least, consider it." He poured the last of the wine. "Visit your friend Leoni, as you plan. Rest and ease your spirit. But you would not think of staying permanently there?"

"No."

"It is a fierce place, Sicily, too fierce for your English blood. Tuscany is different. This has always been a second home for your poets and painters. Bask a while in the Sicilian sun. Then come north again, come here."

Starmer did not answer. The figures had left the fountain and were walking in the direction of the hotel, their hands linked. The woman wore a white dress. In the dusk she was a blur; and young, and beautiful.

Traporti said: "Though I love the city at all seasons, it is best in winter, when one has it to oneself and the streets seem to echo with voices of the past. You remember?"

Starmer drank his wine. "I remember. We'd just married. We'd planned to bird south to Africa, for winter sunshine."

"But you paused here, and we persuaded you to stay, Pia and I."

"You more than Pia."

Traporti laughed. "It was I who did the talking! That was always so. She was a quiet one, my Pia."

"Why?" Traporti looked at him. "Why did you want us to stay?"

"Because it is good, having guests in winter, when no-one otherwise comes to Siena. And we liked you. Why else?"

"That last day..."

Traporti shook his head. "I do not remember. It is twenty years, after all."

Starmer spoke slowly. "I came into this room. I'd been for a final walk round the city, on my own. I entered quietly. You and Katherine were here—I don't know where Pia was. And you and she were kissing."

"Were we?"

"You looked at me over her shoulder, realizing I was in the room. You smiled, and said: 'I am kissing your wife goodbye.'"

"Your memory is better than mine! For kisses, at least."

"What else?" Starmer asked.

"What do you mean: what else?"

"What else happened, during that month? There were opportunities for you and she to be alone. Did you take them?"

"Strange questions! An English joke?" He studied Starmer's face. "No, not a joke, I think. And not something which comes just now into your mind. You have thought of this before. Those times I called you, after you had gone back to England... the strangeness in your manner. Because of this? It was because of this we did not see you again?"

"I'm asking you: what happened?"

"Why did you not ask Katherine?"

"I did."

"And her answer?"

"That there was nothing." He could not conceal bitterness. "No more than a friendly kiss."

"You did not believe her?"

"I didn't know."

"You poor chap." The English expression sounded ludicrous, but Starmer had no urge to laugh. "And what would it have mattered, anyway?"

"Never mind that. Tell me!"

Traporti drained his own glass. "Were there other times you had such doubts, during your life together?"

"Yes."

"And her replies about those?"

"The same."

"With the same effect, no doubt. She was very beautiful, your Katherine. And — *simpatica*. Men would always be drawn to her beauty, be warmed by her smile. You demand to know about that first time — here in Siena? I tell you: nothing happened. Nothing beyond what you saw — a kiss of good friends, in parting. So, I have told you. Are you reassured?"

Starmer did not speak. Traporti went on:

"No, because you cannot believe me either. And reasonably so: if we had shared a bed, she and I, what good would it do to say it now, and make a liar of her? Therefore you ask, but do not listen. That is the sadness."

The piazza was empty. All the swallows had gone, and the sky was beginning to be full of stars.

"We all suffer loneliness," Traporti said. "I too, in my beautiful city. But my loneliness is from outside me. Yours is within, Michael. I pity you for it."

V

Starmer lay on a ledge of rock, with sunlight pink beyond his eyelids. The heat both numbed and entranced him. He thought how good it would be to lie like this forever, hearing only the quiet slap of water below, drained of everything but an inner core of consciousness.

The sound of Leoni scrambling up the rocks was an irritant which he would have liked to ignore but could not. The shadow of his body fell across Starmer, and a drop of cool water splashed his arm. Leoni said:

"You should take a dip, Michael. It is perfect."

"Perhaps later."

"Look down there," Leoni said. "See how clear. Every pebble visible, through five metres of water."

Reluctantly Starmer sat up, shading his eyes with his hand. Leoni squatted beside him. He had kept himself very fit; his body could have been that of a man in mid thirties, black-haired, strongly muscled.

They were alone. The youngsters who worked as voluntary servants simply to be near Leoni had been excluded: Leoni was making a point of devoting himself to his guest. It was unnecessary and a bit exhausting, but kind; and Starmer felt an obligation to respond. He duly admired the sea which was indeed crystal clear, tinged a light blue directly below but deep cobalt further out. Outcroppings of rock gleamed through it. He said, pointing to one of them:

"An odd sort of reef, that."

"That? Not a reef. A wreck."

"A strange shape for a ship. Almost square."

"Landing craft," Leoni said. "E.C.T." He delighted in displaying his knowledge of unusual facts and terms. "From the Hitler war. The British and Americans landed troops along this coast."

"Might you do something on that?"

Leoni shook his head. "I'm interested in the twentieth century, but not in their wars. All very massive and shapeless – dull." He stood up and stretched. "Sicily has known more interesting invasions. The Athenian expedition, for instance. The Athenian fleet was trapped in Syracuse harbour behind a boom, and their soldiers driven into a river between high banks. A river of blood by nightfall. The survivors – citizens of Athens, who had listened to Pericles in the Assembly urging them on to victory – were sold as slaves. Demosthenes died in that battle. Yes, I might well do it, some time."

Leoni had always shown an artless delight in talking of his work. He didn't actually claim to be the world's greatest authenticator, but no-one listening could have doubted he believed it. But he had been like that even as a student. For Leoni, fame had always been not only worth any effort but something certain of attainment.

After he had temporarily exhausted the subject of himself, Leoni returned to the delights offered by the local waters and this time Starmer acquiesced to his urgings. They swam round the headland to a cave that opened into a grotto. Inside in the dimness the water's surface shimmered with distant reflections of the outer world. Hauling himself up onto a flat rock and giving Starmer a hand to follow, Leoni said:

"The word 'grotesque' comes from grotto. Or, in Italian, 'grotta' – a cave. But by a peculiar derivation. When the Emperor Nero's palace in Rome was first

excavated, they found frescoes of the school of painting fashionable in his time. Because they were discovered in what seemed a cave, the style of painting was named 'grotta-esque'. Interesting, don't you think?"

Another small jewel out of Leoni's mental treasure chest. Starmer said:

"Yes. Very interesting."

A maglev line ran along the five miles between beach and villa, further indication of Leoni's affluence. The car, riding on its force lines just clear of the ground, was open, providing a pleasant breeze, rich with the scent of oranges.

The villa, growing out of the hillside, was complexly structured. It was surrounded by a formal garden at the end of which, concealed from view by evergreens, stood the two-roomed huts in which his acolytes slept. They had their meals in the villa, though not, except on special invitation, with their host.

Starmer ate with Leoni and his wife Elvira. He had met her a couple of times before and been slightly puzzled by her. Where Leoni was garrulous and full of nervous energy, she had a cold stillness and rarely smiled. She was, he would have said, handsome, but her movements were graceless – unfeminine. When she spoke, which was not often, her voice was dry, slightly harsh.

But previous encounters had been away from the villa. Seeing her here, Starmer realized what she meant to Leoni. She ran the place and everything connected with it with efficiency and authority. And she subordinated herself and all else to a single end: the protection of Leoni's genius.

The disciples, initially vetted by her, were of both sexes. A couple of the girls were pretty, and Starmer wondered if she counted procuring as part of her office. But he quickly realized that if so he had the gender wrong; it was the young men Leoni stroked and petted.

Starmer was dubious at first about her reaction to him, but her devotion to Leoni's wishes was absolute, his whims enforced with her iron. Starmer was well looked after in this house of luxury. His clothes were taken away the first night and replaced with brightly embroidered silk robes similar to the ones Leoni wore about the house, and servants consulted him constantly, in fact excessively, as to his requirements.

Food was exquisitely prepared and served. Apparently it was a fad of Leoni's to dine, a week at a time, in the manner of other lands or ages. This week, in Starmer's honour, the fashion was Elizabethan England. Roast swan provided the main dish on the first night, suckling pig on the second. Realism was pursued to the extent of serving the meats on saucers of bread rather than plates, with fingers as the principal implements for eating. It was slightly messy, but the silver finger-bowls with their floating rose petals were constantly renewed.

Starmer wondered again as he spooned up sillabub about Leoni's reason for inviting him. Out of compassion over Katherine's death he had presumed, but now that scarcely seemed adequate as an explanation. They had been friends of a sort in their youth, but there had been little contact since. And Leoni, as the

monologue he was presently delivering on the presentation that had won him last year's Kutsuni prize demonstrated, remained a thorough-going egotist. Not, surely, a man to offer refuge to an old acquaintance in his bereavement for simple humanity's sake.

Leoni's studio was on three floors, and constituted the centre and apex of the villa. The top two were working premises – one above ground level, looking across the garden, the other artificially lit and soundproofed. Below that again, and twice the size, was the combined library and showing room. Its focal point was the ur-sphere, a bubble of crystal ten feet in diameter.

Some days after Starmer's arrival they assembled there: Leoni and Elvira, Starmer, the disciples. Leoni had completed a new work and this was to be its first showing. There was an air of excitement and anticipation.

As the room lights dimmed, the ur-sphere glowed with a milky radiance from which a city skyline slowly took shape. The sphere was of madisonite, totally reflectionless: spectators looked directly and without distortion into a microcosm.

Leoni's subject this time was not one of the historical set-pieces for which he was famous, but a more intimate study: of metropolitan life at the height of the pollution era. From the besmogged skyline he dipped into close-ups of automobiles packed in rows in ugly streets, their horns snarling and wailing, garbage cans overflowing with filth, a rat scurrying away from a hunchback who choked in a paroxysm of coughing before lighting up another cigarette. You saw the grey face, the yellowed fingers, heard the wheeze of breath, and smelt the stink of stale tobacco for an instant before the conditioner whisked it away.

There was a backing track based on popular songs of the period, in particular those composed – Leoni informed them – by two men called Lennon and McCartney; airing his knowledge further with the information that they had been performers as well as composers, strolling players one might say. The music was nostalgic, most effective in a minor key. One song recurred in snatches, from a melancholy voice whose nasal tone, Leoni observed with a laugh, was probably due to blocked sinuses, a common disability of the age.

The story concerned two young men employed as clerks in a vast factory-office. Their idealistic views were contrasted with the sordid actuality of their environment. One boarded in a grimy bed-sitting room in a decaying tenement, run by a harridan of a landlady and permeated by foul cooking smells and the raucous blare of radios through thin walls. The other lived with his family: war-crippled father, slatternly mother, sister reeking of cheap scent and looking for cheap sensations, younger brother a heroin addict, injecting himself in a lavatory cubicle. There were gasps at the naked realism of that scene.

Their friendship had homosexual overtones, but the only specific reference came in a scene where, talking high-mindedly on a park bench at night, they were confronted by a policeman who threatened them with a charge of indecency, and extracted all the money they had as a bribe for not proceeding with it. Their real bond was a shared disgust for the world

that surrounded them and a determination to escape from it.

The story dealt with the obstacles that fate and their time put between them and their aspirations. They had hopes of acquiring a smallholding, remote from the areas of pollution, but needed capital to buy it. Attempts to achieve this honestly were frustrated; on the other hand, there were temptations towards easy crooked money. The sister had become the mistress of a gang-leader; the young brother offered them an opportunity to push drugs.

Eventually, with the aid of a benevolent early conservationist, they achieved their objective. But that evening, taking a final walk through the city's mean streets in a choking yellow fog, a fight between blacks and whites spilled out from a grimy bar and engulfed them. The mob dispersed to the shrilling of police whistles. The fair-haired boy was left cradling his friend, stabbed and dying, in his arms.

There was a coda. The blond boy left the city, heading for the rural paradise they had hoped to share. From the wheel of his modest pick-up truck, he could see fields and distant hills. But behind him on the motorway two snarling sports cars diced at over a hundred miles an hour. Rocketing past him, one skidded; he tried desperately to avoid the collision but could not. The cars locked together and burst into flame. As the crash of metal subsided into a shocking stillness, with smoke rising in a dark plume from the wreckage, the nasal voice swelled up ironically:

"I believe in yesterday..."

The ur-sphere faded, and room lights came on. Praise was unanimous, and ecstatic: the best thing Leoni had done, an incredible work of art...a quite perfect authentication of the late twentieth century.

Leoni offered a modest disclaimer. "Not perfect. There are minor anachronisms. The solid-fuel fire in their office is from earlier."

"Dickens..." someone suggested.

"Well, more that period, though they lasted beyond it. But not to the time of that sort of office."

"The effect, though!" That was a young man with a red quiff. "The glow of the coals, and the acrid smoke..."

"As you know," Leoni said, "I've always believed in a balance between art and authentication – that sometimes one needs to sacrifice one, at least in a minor degree, for the sake of the other. And exaggeration is also permissible, within limits. Take the incident in the park. The police were corrupt, but it's improbable that blackmail would have occurred in so blatant a form. One is compressing, you understand – pointing things up."

A girl said: "Actually it counterpointed the scene with the two capitalist bosses – illustrating the way corruption permeated society from top to bottom."

The discussion, or panegyric, went on for some time. Eventually Leoni made a small gesture of tiredness, perhaps of satiety, and Elvira seized on the cue. She told them, in her clipped dry voice, that it was time to permit the Maestro to relax. These first showings were always a strain.

They accepted the dismissal obediently, and she went with them. Starmer rose to leave too, but Leoni asked him to stay. When they were alone, he said:

"I feel tired. Make me a drink, would you?"

Leoni was drinking Scotch, possibly as another gesture of respect for his guest. When he took him the glass, Leoni said:

"Not having one yourself?"

"Not just now."

Leoni stretched, and sighed. "These affairs do take it out of me. The first reactions."

"I suppose they do."

Leoni was silent for a time; then said abruptly:

"I never understood why you didn't become an authenticator."

"Insufficient talent."

"But you *did* have talent, when we were students. Some of the stuff you did before specialization showed great promise, and imagination. In fact you were the only one in our year whose work I thought could eventually be better than mine. Why did you give it up?"

"I thought I'd rather be a gardener."

There was a pause again. Leoni's posture, lying back in the chair, was strained. He asked Starmer:

"My authentication – what did you really think about it? You were the only one who made no comment."

"Elvira didn't."

"Elvira..." He shrugged. "The only one." He came forward in his chair. "Tell me what you thought. Honestly."

His eyes fixed on Starmer with intensity. In that moment Starmer knew the reason for his being asked to stay here. Katherine's death had been the excuse. The explanation went a long way back, to the days when even Leoni had been unsure of himself. He had been summoned to testify to unquestionable success, and to put old doubts to rest. It was necessary that his praise should be added to the acclamation of the disciples. Leoni's peace of mind required it.

And it was something, surely, not too difficult to provide. One could call it a return for hospitality. Under the expectant gaze he started to frame the clichés. But he could not utter them. Echoing Leoni, but in query, he said:

"Honestly?"

"Of course!"

"I thought it was cleverly done, in places brilliant; but false."

Leoni was stung and showed it. "False?"

"To its subject."

Leoni said, heavily sarcastic: "I didn't realize you were an expert on late twentieth-century metropolitan life!"

His anger was moderated by self-confidence. He would have researched exhaustively, as he always did. Starmer said:

"I'm sure the physical details were right, except in deliberate errors, like the coal fire, where you knowingly sacrificed accuracy for effect."

"You condemn that?"

"No. I was thinking of something more important."

Leoni held up the glass and looked at him across it.

"Perhaps you could specify?"

"Your characters were unconvincing."

"In what way?"

"In every way that matters. They belong to this time, not that. Like the philanthropic conservationist."

"Are you trying to tell me," Leoni said in a tolerantly



contemptuous tone, "that there were no generous conservationists in the twentieth century; and no poor devils who wanted to escape from those hideous conurbations?"

"No. I wasn't thinking of the views they expressed. They were unconvincing because they were unreal – pallid, passionless. Creatures of a dying culture. Our culture."

"But the twentieth century was a classic example of decadence! You must have read Marez – the parallels he draws with the late Roman empire..."

"I said dying, not decadent. Decadence normally carries the seeds of new growth. Our society doesn't."

"But that's absurd!"

"We scavenge on our ancestors. The old art forms are dead, or exist merely as pastiche. Authentication is all we have to offer, and it's purely parasitic."

"Parasitic? Because it takes the past as its subject?"

"It goes deeper than that. There used to be a perversion called voyeurism, in which people took sexual pleasure from watching the activities of others. It doesn't exist, of course, in the sanitized world of today. But authentication is voyeurism of a more pitiable kind. It flourishes in a world emotionally so impoverished that it has to conjure up ghosts from the despised past, and suck some kind of vitality from them. Except that it's all an illusion. You get nothing from ghosts but emptiness. Do you know what Henry James said about art?"

"Late nineteenth-century novelist," Leoni said. "An American, who chose to live in England. No, I haven't read him. His work was confined to a limited milieu, I understand."

"And not one offering much scope to the authenticator. Yes, a precious man perhaps, writing about precious people. But he said one unprecious thing – that the flower of art only blooms where the ground has been well manured. As a gardener I can appreciate that."

"But you destroyed your garden, didn't you?"

Leoni was smiling, uncomplicatedly cheerful again. He had not got the praise he'd sought, but being able to categorize Starmer as a misfit, an aberrant, made up for it.

"Perhaps you understand destruction better than you do creativity!"

Starmer said: "I make no claims for myself. "Yes, I destroyed it."

VI

Looking up by chance, Starmer caught sight of a distant dot in the sky. He assumed it was a traveller following the coastline towards the resort fifty miles south; but the dot grew in size, approaching the island. Judging by the green and white of the wings the Bird came from Italy; but it was Martin who got out.

He said: "How are you, Michael?"

"Well enough. As you see." Starmer had been briefly puzzled, but the explanation was obvious. "A bug?"

Martin nodded. "Inside the wing arch."

"So you've been tracking me since I left England?"

"Yes."

"And like a conscientious Counsellor have come to inspect your wandering sheep. It's a long way to

travel on a pastoral visit."

Martin smiled. "And the final lap in a hired Italian Bird. They gear them for a different kind of flying than I'm used to. More than a little tricky. I airshipped to Trieste and picked it up there."

"As I said, a long way."

"I gather you left Leoni fairly suddenly."

"Yes. I thought you might get a call about that."

"You said one or two odd things, according to him."

"Only odd? I criticized authentication as an art form, and his work in particular. Surely that qualifies as raving insanity?"

Still smiling, Martin said: "I thought your criticism was directed more towards the modern world in general."

"That too."

"You feel we lead impoverished lives compared with our forebears. We lack the primitive luxuries of overcrowding, disease, violence, war. Isn't that it?"

"It's a way of putting it."

They stood not far from a small grove of olive trees, whose leaves flickered from grey-green to silver-grey in a breeze from the sea. The sky was mostly clear but there was high cloud to the west. Starmer had a feeling that the weather, perfect during the week he had been here, might be on the point of breaking.

"Do you mind if we sit in the shade?" Martin asked. "I find this heat a bit extreme after ten days of steady rain in England."

They sat on warm powdery earth under the shivering olive trees; nearby a lizard was immobile in a patch of sunlight.

Martin said: "Can we talk about Katherine?"

"I'd rather not."

"Why?"

"Does that matter? Let's say I don't want to discuss her, with you or anyone."

"Haven't you already done so?"

Starmer looked at him keenly. "Did you have a call from Siena as well? Or was it the other way round? Checking up on my contacts?"

"I was thinking of further north than Siena."

"Maria? You have been thorough. And presumably they've been talkative."

"What you must try to understand," Martin said, "is that people are concerned for you. You may not see things their way, but you should accept that they mean well."

"Mean well? Oh yes, I accept that. Did she tell you how that particular episode ended – with me pumping my seed into her? Not that it matters. Infertile seed into a barren womb. A betrayal lacking even biological justification."

"Betrayal seems important to you." Starmer was silent. "I gather you revealed doubts, to both Maria and Carlo, over the possibility that Katherine may have known other men sexually during your marriage." He ignored Starmer's gesture of revulsion. "Would you like to have the doubts resolved?"

"They can't be, now."

"You forget: I was her Counsellor too."

Starmer looked away. "I'm not interested."

"Why? Because you're afraid of what you might find out?"

The lizard twitched, then turned again to stone. Starmer said nothing.

"Let's talk about you then, instead of Katherine. I've been going through your record. You had the usual routine analysis at eighteen. It doesn't seem to have been very satisfactory in your case."

"No. Not on either side."

"You were recorded as uncooperative. Would you accept that as accurate?"

"I wouldn't reject it. The whole business struck me as pointless."

"According to your analyst you had an underlying pregenital neurosis, to which you'd made a good superficial adjustment."

"Kind of him to say so."

"Neuroses are practically unknown now, under normal conditions of nurturing. Yours was traumatic in origin. Your analyst felt you had good ego strength and had adjusted well, so he did not pursue it when you refused therapy. In point of fact, he had information on the cause of your disturbance which he kept to himself."

"Why?"

"He felt it would not have helped at that stage to discuss it with you."

"And you feel it would now?"

"It might. The circumstances were distinctly unusual. You were an only child and your mother had a fatal cerebral haemorrhage when you were eight months old. Normally you would have been picked up within an hour, and intensive surrogate care would have minimized deprivation. But your father was away, you and your mother alone in the house, and the alarm system was defective. It was thirty-six hours before you were found. Your physical condition was poor, but could be put right. The emotional wound was a more difficult problem. Thirty-six hours is a long time to a baby, and you were at a critical stage of inter-relating. The wound healed superficially, but not at a deeper level. You developed the neurosis which is responsible for your basic mistrust of relationships."

"Explaining," Starmer suggested, "my failure to count my blessings as a member of the late twenty-first century elect?"

"That would seem probable."

"And the remedy? I'm sure you have one."

"Analytical therapy."

"Why should you think I would be more inclined to accept it now than when it was first offered?"

"You're older, and one would hope more sensible. And you need it. You've been hurt badly, Michael. Bereavement is painful for anyone. It was worse for you because it reactivated the original feeling of loss, of being abandoned."

"And my reward for cooperativeness? Adjustment to society: healthy relations with my fellow men – and women?"

"Yes."

"But perhaps I don't want that. Perhaps, despite the poor prognosis, I managed to have one good relationship in my life; and perhaps it was so good I don't want any other."

"You're talking about your love for Katherine?"

"Just that."

Martin rubbed his hand in the dust. An incongruity, Starmer thought: those sensitive white fingers had nothing in common with this ancient soil. Martin said, after a pause:

"Do you remember the words you spoke, when you realized she was dead?"

"No. I don't remember much of that day."

"You spoke them to me. You said: 'She was looking at you, not me.'"

"Did I?"

"Was that an expression of love, or resentment? Like your jealousy of Carlo, and the nagging doubts about other men. You were faithful to her through twenty years of marriage."

"In your view, that was wrong?"

"Shall we say – unusual? And yet within days of her death you had sexual congress with another woman, a stranger. Out of physical need? Surely not. You'd been continent for far longer periods – during the months in which she was dying, for instance. So why then?"

He leaned forward, and the shifting leaves dashed his face with sunlight.

"You called it betrayal, but might not reprisal be the better term? There was a core of resentment inside that love you cherish. Dying, she abandoned you, as your mother had done. And you hated her for it; and wanted to get even. But the hatred wasn't anything new. It had been there all the time. It was there when you were first married, that winter in Siena."

The olive branches shook in a sharper breeze. It would probably rain before dark.

"I don't say these things to hurt you," Martin said, "but to help. You're in distress, and you don't have to be. But first you have to understand."

"I understand," Starmer said. "I wonder if you do."

"What?"

"Of course there was hate along with the love. *Odi et amo*: a young poet said it a long time ago. 'I hate and I love.' He went on to say: 'I do not know why, but I know I feel the pain.'"

"The pain can be cured. That's a promise."

"Yes, I'm sure it can. Just as, on a larger scale, those other things were cured: the violence and disease and war. Perhaps I prefer the sickness to the remedy."

"Because you yourself are ill."

"By your standards. Not by mine. Keep your sane and healthy paradise of balance and harmony. I'll take the depths; and the heights."

"So you choose the pain?"

"If you put it that way, yes."

It was some moments before Martin spoke again. He asked:

"Are you planning to stay on the island?"

"For the time being. Unless an air-ambulance happens to put down. I realize you can always score a technical victory. Analysis may require cooperation, but drugs don't."

"In my view," Martin said, "you are not a danger, either to yourself or society; which would be the only valid justification for action of that sort."

"Thank you."

"We're not monsters, you know."

"I do know. It might almost be better if you were."

"You have all you need, from the material point of view?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll leave you in peace. You know how to reach me if you want to."

"Yes."

Martin stood up, and Starmer did the same. The lizard skittered away to a crevice in the rocks. Martin said:

"I notice you've been doing some digging over there."

"Yes."

"Another garden?"

"Probably."

"I'd like to see it when it's finished."

"It never will be," Starmer said. "That's the point."

John Christopher (Sam Youd) was born in Liverpool in 1922, and has enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a freelance writer. He is the author of about 50 novels, which have appeared under several names in a number of genres. He now lives in semi-retirement in Rye, East Sussex.

His greatest successes have included the science-fiction novels *The Death of Grass* (1956), *The World in Winter* (1962), *A Wrinkle in the Skin* (1965) and *Pendulum* (1968). He is also known for his children's sf and fantasy books, including the "Tripods" trilogy (1967-68), the "Sword of the Spirits" trilogy (1970-72) and many others. Some have been adapted to television and have won awards. Writing as "Hilary Ford," he had a successful secondary career as an author of women's romantic fiction from the late 1950s until the late 1970s. Others of his books, mainly thrillers, have appeared under the pseudonyms "William Godfrey," "Peter Graaf," "Peter Nichols" and "Anthony Rye," as well as under his real name of Samuel Youd.

Like Bob Shaw's "Dark Night in Toyland" (*Interzone* 26), the above story was written some years ago for a much-trumpeted original sf anthology which failed to appear. We are delighted to make it available to readers for the first time anywhere.

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Joe Haldeman

Interview by Stan Nicholls

When Joe Haldeman wrote *The Forever War* it was rejected by eighteen publishers before anyone would take it on. "The first editor who saw it said he was going to print it," he says. "That was Terry Carr, for the Ace Science Fiction Specials. But he was fired, and told to take all his manuscripts with him. Subsequently I tried to place it elsewhere and was turned down by every publisher I approached.

"Then I was at a cocktail party in New York, and Ben Bova took me over to an editor who wasn't even doing science fiction, and Bova said, 'Why don't you give this guy a chance? It's a great book.' And he did. That was St Martin's Press, and I essentially started their science fiction line." The novel, published in 1974, has sold over a million copies to date.

He is philosophical about the problems he had getting it into print. "Something that's a radical departure is always difficult to get published. *The Forever War* was not a radical departure stylistically; the only problem was that it was obviously a metaphor about Vietnam, and nobody thought the public wanted to buy a metaphor about Vietnam, least of all couched in science-fiction terms. If I were Joseph Heller, writing it in conventionally modern language, that would be different."

He rebuffs the idea that the book was a conscious exorcism of his experiences in Vietnam, where he was wounded in action. "I didn't feel that way at the time, although I may have hoped it would be. I had earlier written a mainstream novel about Vietnam, *War Year*, which fulfilled that function. That came out in 1972 and sank without a trace.

"I couldn't write a science-fiction book for my first novel because I had too much respect for the genre. I thought it would be too hard. That's why I wrote a mainstream novel. Then I did two spy stories under a pseudonym, Robert Graham. *The Forever War* was in fact my fourth novel, and I'd had more than a dozen short stories published by that time, so it wasn't as if I worked on it for a decade to get my final reward.

"But I was surprised when it won the awards it did, and I know there were factors external to the quality of

the book which helped it win at least the Nebula, because there was a lot of controversy about the other books associated with the award that year. I was lucky; I had the most conventional book, and a lot of people who voted for me were probably voting against either *The Female Man* or *Dhalgren*. Both books I think were very worthy, but I maybe got a lot of votes from people who hadn't even read mine."

Is it true that *Forever War* was written in response to Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*? "Not directly. I thought *Starship Troopers* was adequately answered by Harry Harrison's *Bill, The Galactic Hero*. I have some respect for *Starship Troopers*, even though I'm politically on the other side of the fence. As a didactic novel it's tremendously successful. But Heinlein read *Forever War*, and liked it. He read it several times, he said, and sent me a note when I won the Hugo that really meant more than the award to me."

Haldeman had been reading sf since he was nine years old. And it was very much a family interest. "My brother Jack became addicted about the same time I did," he remembers, "when our father bought us two science-fiction books one Christmas. Mine was *Rocket Jockey* by Lester Del Rey, writing under the name Philip St John; Jack's was *Earthbound* by Milton Lesser. So we read our sf books, and I loved mine so much I went back to the beginning and read it over and over all vacation. Then I kept reading it at school, and my teacher, a dear heart, instead of punishing me for reading when I was supposed to be studying, loaned me a Robert Heinlein novel! I was hooked from that point and read everything I could get my hands on." Haldeman's first short story, "Out of Phase," appeared in *Galaxy* magazine in 1969.

For the last seven years he has been teaching creative writing part-time at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He finds this a two-way traffic, learning as much from his students as they do from him. "Mostly what I learn is by having to reformulate what I think about fiction and about writing," he explains. "My classes are a sort of stratified mixture of formal teaching

and very informal workshop. That is, I start out lecturing and giving them various precepts which they argue about, and think of ways to attack. Then they begin writing and get into criticism of one another's work. I guess I see it as being a very fluid way of addressing myself as much as my students.

"When the MIT job came along they wanted me to work full-time. I wouldn't do that, but I ended up teaching every Fall semester. That's three months out of each year. It's become very much a part of my life, and the main benefit is the release from the hermetic aspect of writing; actually getting out in front of the classroom and interacting with the students, and having fellow teachers around. It's a pleasant kind of antidote to the loneliness of writing. Certainly the money is no great attraction, especially in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is almost as expensive as London.

"In general the students are from 18 to 21 years old, with the occasional child prodigy - I think our youngest was thirteen. I've had a few who were post-doctoral, including some in their thirties, and they often make the best writers because they have something to write about. Not that that's a necessary prerequisite. Students come in and they learn something about me and say, 'You've done all these things, but we've never been soldiers or anything like that, how can we write?' Obviously the thing is to teach them to use their imagination. You don't have to have done something if you can imagine what it was like, and can convince somebody else. That's a big lesson. Some of them never learn it."

His own working methods are more instinctive than formal. "I make a lot of notes, but I tend to be just rambling. You know, I think that within the next two chapters Sam had better find the box with the descrambler in it, that kind of thing. Often I can't figure out what the next sentence is going to be, so I sit down and write some notes just to keep myself busy, and to free something up. With a three-hundred-page book I'll probably have a hundred pages of notes, but most of them wouldn't make sense to anybody but me.

"I admire people who plan. It must

be a source of some real relief or freedom from anxiety. But I usually don't know how things are going to end until at least the last third of the book. Sometimes I see it and write straight toward it. But sometimes I don't. I wrote a book called *Tool of the Trade*, which had what I thought was a very successful ending, but that ending occurred to me the morning I woke up and wrote it."

With his latest novel, *The Hemingway Hoax*, he did know what form the ending would take. "I could have written the ending any time, because I had a specific literary goal in mind, and that sort of guided me. But that one was a problem because the ending is deliberately ambiguous, and even obscure, which I thought I could get away with. Although some people told me I shouldn't have tried to get away with it."

Why? "Most of my work is fairly straightforward, and I'm not out to confuse anybody. But this is one of these time-travel, parallel-universe things, and I was using it to express a sort of ambiguity about Hemingway's reputation, and the various contradicting details of his biography."

"The thing is I'd finished the book and had a visitor who is a scholar – as a matter of fact he's doing some papers on my own work – and I gave him the typescript to read and he thought it was the best thing I'd ever written. I thought it was too, of course. So far, unanimous opinion. Then my wife read it and said she didn't understand the ending. Another guy who was staying at our house read it and he didn't understand the ending either. Neither of my editors understood the ending. One of them, who's a fairly educated, literary guy, said, 'Do you have to be a Hemingway scholar to understand this book?' So I went through and sort of analytically figured out the things I had excluded – because I'm very familiar with Hemingway's background and the critical universe surrounding him – and put in some references that gave the missing information, and got the book acceptable at least to those two editors."

"Some of the things the plot turns on are sentences buried in the middle of paragraphs that look like red herrings. It's that kind of a book. You have to read it carefully to understand it. It's got the most graphic violence and the most erotic sex I've ever written, and yet it's a book about literary figures, and it's very deliberately a piece of metafiction."

Crucial to the plot are a set of Hemingway's manuscripts lost by his first wife, Hadley, in a Paris railway station. "All we know is that those manuscripts went missing," Haldeman says. "Hemingway had three different stories at three different times of his life explaining why his wife got off

the train and left them unguarded. She herself had several different explanations. Other evidence says that the lost manuscripts consisted of several short stories, and a novel about Hemingway's World War One experiences."

"There's further evidence that Hemingway had a very low opinion of not only the novel but the missing short stories too. One thing that came out in Michael Reynolds' book *The Paris Years* is that Hemingway failed to even put a want ad in any of the papers to find his manuscripts, which represented three years' worth of work, remember. He said he was going to do it, but he never did. And that would have cost about five dollars. There seems to be an indication that Hemingway was glad to have lost them, and glad to have this tragedy central to his career, so he could start over as a brave man with this great wound."

"There's also a possibility that Hadley threw them away, maybe because she knew that Hemingway wanted her to. The thing is that she was supporting him with a two-thousand-dollar-a-year inheritance from her grandfather, but as Hemingway's literary reputation grew he was making more and more money. Hadley was eight or nine years older than him, he was being courted by all these beautiful women, and she might have been getting very much afraid that if he had an independent income she'd lose him. In fact she lost him by losing the manuscripts. But she remained a graceful and courtly woman until the end, and was always very good in terms of keeping mum about Hemingway. She was a much better woman than he was a man. He often regretted losing her."

"I don't know, it's creepy. But the mystery of this very central historical fact is what made me think in terms of science fiction. What if these versions were all true? What if there are all these parallel universes going? Could I come up with some sort of story that would make this possible?"

"One of the fascinating and recurring patterns in Hemingway's life was that as soon as he married a woman he would start looking for another one. It got to be so ridiculous that his last wife, Mary, just wouldn't let him go. I mean, by this time he was a millionaire, he was the most famous writer in the world, and he could have brought German shepherds home and she wouldn't have done anything. As it is, he brought a teenage Italian countess home, to their place in Cuba, and nothing would embarrass Mary enough to leave, or give him any kind of grounds for divorce. As a matter of fact she got hers back in spades after he died by publishing all of these things he didn't want to have printed, essentially sabotaging his literary reputation, in the guise of making the record complete. But most scholars

are willing to take these unfinished fragments, these first drafts and so forth, for what they are."

Haldeman admires the craftsmanship in Hemingway's work. "Among the things that have been revealed are the forty-two different endings he wrote to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. I've read them all, and he did choose the best one. Obviously he kept writing until he found the best one. He was very careful, word for word. He was a little sloppier in the novels than in the short stories, but we all are."

"I don't know when I've written anything as long as *The Hemingway Hoax* that I've enjoyed so much and so consistently. I wrote it in I think just one day over a year, and I wrote it all over the world in longhand and on a manual typewriter. And instead of doing scientific research I was doing literary research. It was the first novel I've ever done where I had to bury myself in another writer's work and analyse his life. I guess the necessity for intellectual rigour that is always there when you're writing science fiction made it more fun to do."

Another vital element in the story is a 1921 Corona typewriter, similar to the one Hemingway had himself, on which the conman protagonist types his forgeries. Haldeman would like to have written *The Hemingway Hoax* on such a machine. "I looked all over Boston for one, and even checked out a person claiming to have Hemingway's actual Corona, up in Toronto. I don't believe that's true, because I know it was battered in Constantinople – a taxi driver dropped it – and I don't think Hemingway had it fixed. If he did, it had new founts put on, because the typing style changes after that. So I abandoned the search, and in the end wrote the book on a 1923 Smith's, most of it, including all of the things that appear to be typed by Hemingway. One old typewriter is much like another, and I doubt that any critic is going to go find a 1921 Corona – because if I can't find one they can't either!"

"Typing up pastiches of Hemingway's work was probably the least fun when writing the novel, because I felt a real responsibility to the readers. It's easy to do a parody of Ernest Hemingway, but I was trying to do a credible job of Hemingway's first drafts before he was in control of his craft, for which we have very little actual hard copy. So you just have to look at how he used words, and how he changed them."

"It's the same way I use physics and engineering in my normal novels. I have to be convinced of the reality of them, so that I can project that reality as an artist. This is just a different way of going about it."

"When I wrote the book I had an office way across town, and I'd bicycle there. For a couple of hours I'd be lost

in more or less mindless meditation. Then I'd sit down and write for two or three hours and get as much done as I would have sitting at the typewriter for six or eight hours at home. That lasted until the people who were renting my office got too successful, and all the adjoining offices filled up with little businesses, with people chattering and smoking. I can't write with people smoking around me, as an ex-smoker, so I had to give that up.

"Now, I've got a little laptop computer, and I put it on my bicycle and pedal to a state park. In Florida of course ninety-nine mornings out of a hundred the weather's fine. So I set up on a picnic table, and in the morning nobody every comes out. My company is birds and squirrels and such. It's strangely bucolic, and I'm sitting there writing about the most urban environment imaginable, such as the inside of a generation starship."

Haldeman has some firm convictions about writing, and the current state of the sf field. "I have a sort of set of ideals, I guess, that aren't even formally laid-out. But there are things I think a writer shouldn't do. Sometimes I may write poorly, but it's not because I'm sloppy, it's not because I rush things or try to do a dishonest job.

"I stopped reading science fiction fanatically when I was in college in the sixties. These days I have to read all my students' manuscripts, and that's like *War and Peace* every semester, and it's *War and Peace* as written by a freshman. So when I get out I don't want to read science fiction. I do read books that people are still talking about a couple of years after they come out. I just read Gibson's *Neuromancer*, for instance. Sometimes I'll read a book because it won the Hugo, Nebula or World Fantasy Award. Or if a friend says, 'This is just wonderful.'

"The thing is I feel professionally I have little enough to learn from my colleagues. It's not because they are not as good writers as I am, but we all have a similar basic training. Other people of my generation have read the same two thousand science-fiction books I did. Now I read a lot of physics and astronomy, I read histories and biographies, and I read poetry. I read a great deal of criticism of the work of American writers of the twenties and thirties, because that's a period which fascinates me. Possibly because I want to be there. I want to be on the Left Bank, getting some respect for my goddamn work!

"A lot of the science fiction I read these days looks first draft, and just ill-conceived. Well, there's a market for it and I can't blame anybody for wanting to write it, and often I suppose that's the best these people can do. But I wouldn't let it out of the house."

At the top end of the market big

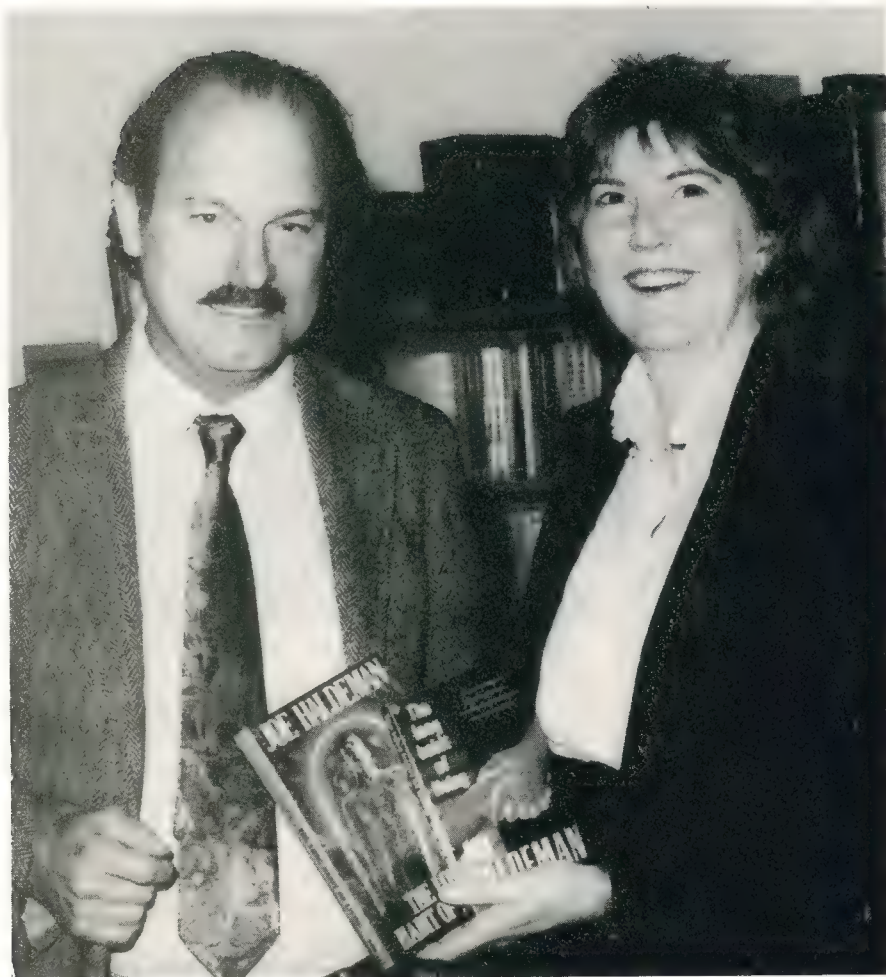


Photo of Joe Haldeman with Carolyn Caughey, his editor at Hodder

names are being paid large advances for lacklustre work. "That happens to a lot of writers, and not just in science fiction. Hemingway himself wrote an eighteen-hundred-page novel that he sealed-up in cellophane and put away in a safe rather than send it to his publisher. He said, 'Some day I'll get back to this, but it really stinks.' It became *The Garden of Eden* after he died. Oddly enough, people who have read the eighteen-hundred-page manuscript, instead of the truncated one they brought out, say it's very interesting reading. It's not a novel at all, it's about sexuality and writing, among other things. They had to cut all the good parts to make a story out of it!

"It's like Heinlein's last books, when he got so big he could write anything he wanted, and not be edited. *Number of the Beast* has so many fannish references that a person who hasn't been reading science fiction all their life couldn't make head nor tail of it. That can't have helped his reputation. Yet maybe he was up there so high, what difference does it make?

"In the States, the field has suffered from over-exploitation, and this is becoming a problem. It's a problem for young writers especially. It's a problem for me, too, because I'm sort of top mid-list. That is to say, I could get the axe. Not like somebody at the bottom of the list who's just scrabbling for a

reputation; but I'm not as secure as the Clarkes and Bradburys of this world. On the other hand I can write all sorts of things. I could sidestep and do mainstream fiction, and probably be about as happy.

"When I first enjoyed reading, all I read was sf. So when I started writing, I started writing science fiction. There's a kind of inertia involved. I like to think sf is important because of the latitude of themes you're allowed. I can write about anything, and nowadays I can write in any style I want, which wasn't true when I started.

"I believe at least part of the function of fiction is to provide an informal social record. That's one reason I think Stephen King is going to survive, because he is such a good photographic record of America in this part of the twentieth century. King is one of the few writers around where I can start a book and just not want to do anything else but read it.

"I used to like Moorcock, Aldiss, Ballard, Delany and Zelazny. They opened up the field stylistically to the point where you really can write any way you want, and if the story's well told, you can find somebody to publish it. That makes it exciting to me. In fact, if you step back, I suspect it's more true in science fiction than it is in literary fiction. In the literary mainstream in the States, somebody who's really

experimental can get published, but not commercially. You'll wind up in some little university press, with maybe a thousand copies being printed."

Increasingly, Haldeman is moving into other media, and he has written several plays. "I enjoy writing plays, but I don't know that I'll ever do another one. You have to be pretty wealthy to spend that much time on something that pays so little. But it was valuable experience for screenplay work."

"In that respect, there are two very interesting projects in hand. First, *Forever War*, which has been optioned several times over the years, now has an option on it that's about as serious as it's ever been. The guy who bought it did the special effects for the second *Star Wars* movie, and he's putting together a package, as they do, and if the package comes through it looks like it may happen."

"But the other one, which is more exciting for me now, is *Buying Time*, which here is published as *The Long Habit of Living*. The man who produced *sex, lies and videotape*, John Cale, has picked up a very promising option on that, which includes my writing the first draft of the screenplay. He teaches at Harvard, which is just along the street from MIT, so we can have our script conferences by just strolling down. I like him a lot. He started out as a concert pianist, then he did an MD degree and became a psychiatrist, and he followed that with a business degree. Now he's a professor at Harvard teaching business, meanwhile making I don't know how many millions of dollars on the side producing movies. And he's younger than I am, the bastard."

Other work in progress confirms his reputation as a writer capable of confounding expectations. "I like to keep switching things around. My next book is going to be thoroughly strange; a realistic novel told from the viewpoint of a terminal schizophrenic, so you can't trust anything he says. The one after that is going to have fifty main characters. I don't like to read the same kind of thing over and over, and I don't want to be the kind of writer who just turns out the same thing either. I could have re-written *The Forever War* for the rest of my life and made a lot of money. People keep after you to write a sequel to it. But it's done."

"It's true that I'm writing a trilogy, but I've been writing it now for almost sixteen years. It's a single novel that will be released in three volumes, and it's a book that has to grow with me. When I'm good and ready I'll have it finished. So nobody can accuse me of knocking off three quickies to make some money. I'm a commercial writer, I've got nothing against people who

write for money; they're in there with Shakespeare for one thing. But on the other hand I'm nervous around people who are proud of just writing for money."

The writer's life offers various advantages. "The first thing I think of is the freedom. You can write anywhere, you can live anywhere. But when I think about that, it seems to me that in many ways I'm less free than a lot of people who have actual jobs. I have deadlines that are forming the parameters of my life for the next four or five years. There's no guarantee that I can finish those books; except that I have finished the last sixteen or seventeen. I have to work every day, but I don't get paid for that day's work for another year or two, so I don't have the immediate feedback of a pay cheque."

"One advantage is that I guess we all want to be successful and want to be admired, and from the time you publish your first story to some extent you are a successful, admired person. Because you know about all those thousands of people who never had their stories published even if they worked all their lives on them. When you finally get to the point where you're making even a barely post-relief income, you're a

tremendous success compared to most writers; and if you ever get like me, into the actual middle class, it means you're in the upper echelons."

"A disadvantage when you become prominent is that the wrong kind of people start paying attention to you. You get a lot who think you're going to believe anything they say about you so long as it's good; people who are trying to make money off your writing without being seriously appreciative of it. Once a book comes out the phone starts to ring. It's so and so and he's a producer. Well, he's not a producer, he's a person who has a telephone number in Los Angeles. You don't know that, so you call your Hollywood agent who chases him down and finds there's nothing to it. Meanwhile this 'producer' has told you he's read all your stuff and he's going to make such a great movie and blah, blah, blah."

"One of the things I find it really hard to cope with are the strange responses you get from certain people when they discover you write science fiction. They say, 'Oh, do you believe in flying saucers?' You have to feel pity for people like that."

Joe Haldeman's *The Hemingway Hoax* is published by New English Library at £11.95.

ReCONnaissance

The Park Hotel, Cardiff, 22nd to 24th February 1991

New Works and New Ideas in SF

Reconnaissance is a convention about what's new in SF. We have no single guest, but a number of Special Participants, who will take part in the programme and air the views of the new creators in SF. Some of our Special Participants will be new to you, some will be established authors, but all will be looking forward to the future of SF.

Reconnaissance has, as a result, been put together in a different way to many other conventions. We started with a name, which led to the theme of *New Works and New Ideas in SF*. The range of programme items and the programme structure then followed logically from this, allowing the Special Participants to be chosen to fit in with the overall programme. Thus, we have kept to our theme throughout (with a few inevitable excursions into the silly items that no con should do without).

If you are interested in participating in *Reconnaissance*, please talk to us. Though we are (or at least, were) when we started *Reconnaissance* a group of fans new to convention running, and have fewer preconceptions about what we are doing, we cannot be expected to encompass the range of opinions and specialisms that make up the world of SF. We need your help, and we would be nothing without the co-operation of the new creators in SF, so tell us what we can do for you and you can do for us.

Enough about our high-flown theories, and back to basics: the convention will be held over the weekend of the 22nd to 24th February 1991 at the Park Hotel in Cardiff. The Park is a four star hotel just one minute out of the main-line station by local train (or 10 minutes walk from main-line station) and on one of Cardiff's main pedestrian shopping streets.

To register for the convention please send your membership fee (currently £18 attending, £10 supporting, but please note that these rates may change after 12 November 90) to the address below.

When you join, you will receive the first three copies of *Dispatches* which includes a piece by John Clute on the *Science Fiction Foundation* (our convention charity), an article by Colin Greenland investigating the new writers and chasing the spectre of *Technogoth*, the newest 'New Wave', and an article by Frances Bonner on 'TV and Film SF in the Post-Mundane World'.

If you have any views on the future of your genre, or would like to hear more, come and talk to us.

To join, please copy the form below and return it to:

Reconnaissance, 5 St. Andrews Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 2DY.

Current Special Participants: Gill Alderman, Lionel Fanthorpe, Dave Langford, Mary Gentle, Colin Greenland, John Gribbin, Lorna Mitchell, Terry Pratchett, David Pringle, Alex Stewart, Charles Stross, Dean Wayland

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TV Reviews

Continued from page 21

wife and finds out what happens when you grow up and quit the Jets – but then this is not unique, actors have been trailing their previous roles as ironic shadows behind their current ones since Shakespeare looked for Burbage's next part after Hamlet.

The Freudian label is perhaps more helpful given Lynch's tendency to throw symbols and misogyny at us – those peaks! The men have characters, weird though they are, but the women tend only to have characteristics, the patch, the log.

My own label for *Twin Peaks* would be "cool." Cool as in hip as in whatever the word of the moment is for the cynical, detached attitude the fashion-conscious existential man takes to his world. Cool also in the emotional temperature: there are scenes of straightforward melodrama where (for example) a mother learns of her daughter's murder, a mill owner finds evidence she is being robbed by her sister-in-law, a biker is threatened with murder by two boys who could probably get away with it, each emotional crisis orchestrated and underscored and highlighted by throbbing music. Yet we are not involved. A cool attitude is engendered by the weird or surreal details used to turn us off emotionally. The mother hears the news of the murder only in the silence as her husband is called away from the other end of the phone by the arrival of the sheriff. The mill-owner's coffee percolator contains a fish, the biker is threatened by the two boys barking like rabid hounds. There is more sobbing per hour of *Twin Peaks* than you would imagine possible and yet there is no question of us sobbing in sympathy. We watch in detachment, in the back of the mind marking a scorecard with points out of ten. If they go too far it becomes funny. *Twin Peaks* is often very funny indeed.

The most shocking scene I have ever encountered in a television programme was at the end of an episode of the private eye series *Magnum* when *Magnum* was holding the bad guy at bay at the point of a gun. The fight was over, the good guy had won, but the bad guy was taunting him, daring him to shoot. We all know what is supposed to happen next – good guys aren't allowed to shoot bad guys in cold blood but they are allowed to put the gun down and sock the bad guy with a manly right to the jaw.

Magnum shot him.

If the good guys don't act like good guys how can you tell they aren't bad guys?

The arguments about violence, bad language and sexually explicit mate-



rial being shown on television are well rehearsed and not the subject I wish to address: my own view is that the moral framework in which a programme is placed is more important than the number of times they say "fuck." However, the moral arguments about the influence of art are as old as criticism itself. Plato and Aristotle, mimesis and catharsis, imitation and...well, catharsis won't really translate except as "purging," the orgasmic feeling of having identified with the characters and undergone the roller-coaster ride of the emotions along with them and thus got those emotions out of your system.

When the critics call *Twin Peaks* postmodernist or surreal they are referring to the weirdness: the log lady, the eye-patch lady, the eternally chattering receptionist, the FBI agent who thinks throwing named stones at a bottle will identify the killer, the sheriff who admits to being a member of a secret society that protects the town from the evil lurking somewhere "out there," the dream dwarf, the dead girl's identical cousin. But in fact the effect of the weirdness is to prevent us from identifying with any of the characters as we are intended to identify with *Magnum* and so to prevent us from being shocked at anything any of the characters might do as we are shocked when *Magnum* shoots someone in cold blood. Dictating memos about the cherry pie becomes neither less nor more weird and less nor more reprehensible than helping vigilantes kidnap someone. We imitate some of the traits of the characters – how many lines have you heard quoted from *Twin Peaks* lately? But we do not achieve catharsis and that cool view of morality is why the series as a whole is so rebarbative.

The second series is well under way

in the States and they are still no nearer to finding out Who Killed Laura Palmer – but, then again, who cares? "In real life there is no algebra."

(Wendy Bradley)

Note: since the above review was written, it seems that American audiences have learned the identity of Laura Palmer's killer.

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Fugitives from the Watch Ward

Alethea Amsden

Dear Mr Galliard:

2nd July

I have read your recent publication *The Argalian Wars*, with great interest. I would however like to correct you on a couple of points:—

1. The Princess Eldreda was in fact born in 883 (old calendar). I refer you to *Chronicles of the Royal House of Marekt* (Gildenberg 1892) where this date is given, along with the reasons for preferring it to the date of 875 stated by you on p.372.

2. As you will appreciate, this makes her far too young to have married Erlim the Black. His spouse was in fact the Lady Eldora, only child and heiress of the Wizard Herelwind. I cannot quite understand how this confusion arose – perhaps a scribe's error led you astray? Certainly, this accounts for the Wizard's decision to take Erlim's side in the war. Your suggestion that he did so from fear of Gorival's talisman is quite laughable. No talisman imaginable could have turned Gorival into any kind of opposition for Herelwind, who was the supreme mage of the time. (See my *Mages of Ninth-Century Trinia*, Pentastar Press, 1983).

3. I am afraid you are even further off the mark in your suggestion that the loss of the Tower of Sharuf was due to the treachery of Boldwight the Frog. As I am sure you will realize when you re-read the *Amphioidiae*, he was in fact a prisoner of Muglug at the time. No, the fall of the Tower was, I regret to say, due to simple incompetence on the part of its Warden, Awk. He held the appointment by virtue of being the illegitimate son of the previous king of Marekt, Helbaound the Second. It was, alas, his only virtue, though I believe he faced his end courageously enough – perhaps he was too stupid to do otherwise.

I trust that you will put these errors right in any future editions of your book, which incidentally shows a sad lack of familiarity with the textual variants recorded in the versions of the *Chronicles* preserved by the junior branch of the family. Nonetheless, your volume is a praiseworthy attempt to present a popular history of those stirring times, and I trust that you will continue your work, albeit with rather more attention to detail.

Yours faithfully,

Karolus Mitnord

Emeritus Professor of Atlantean History
University of Claucht

Dear Professor Mitnord:

2nd August

Thank you for your letter, which I have just seen on my return from holiday. I was very amused by your way of criticizing my novel, which makes a nice change from all those boring old know-it-alls who write in saying that some utterly minor character is described as having red hair on page 99 and brown hair on page 180.

I like your suggestion about the Wizard Herelwind – I only wish I had thought of it, as I agree it makes much better sense than what I did write. Unfortunately, works of fiction can't be changed just because someone thinks of a better plot twist! Also, I'm afraid that I do like to think of the work I do as all my own effort, so I won't be incorporating your ideas in the rest of the trilogy. Thanks all the same – it's good to know that someone is taking my efforts seriously.

Yours sincerely,

John Galliard

Dear Mr Galliard:

19th August

I simply cannot understand your attitude. I appreciate that you may have felt obliged to present your work as fiction in order to avoid the attentions of those members of the Watch Ward who still survive, but why pretend to me? No Atlantean scholar can possibly be deceived as to the degree of unrecorded information that has gone into *The Argalian Wars*. Surely you cannot suppose me to be on the side of Hadrad the Usurper?

If you require evidence of my good faith and devotion to the House of Marekt, perhaps we could meet – taking suitable precautions of course. Surely my willingness to risk myself at such a meeting will convince you of my good faith?

Yours faithfully,

Karolus Mitnord

Emeritus Professor of Atlantean History
University of Claucht

Dear Professor Mitnord:

3rd September

A joke's a joke, but I think this one's gone far enough. I assure you – as if it is necessary – that every word of *The Argalian Wars* is pure fantasy, the unaided product of my imagination. Sure, I read up on all the Atlantis cranks before I wrote it, but that's all. So let's call this nonsense off now, eh? You may have nothing

better to do than write me nutty letters, but I'm a working writer, and I can't spare the time.
Yours sincerely,
John Galliard

P.S. I've looked up the University of Claucht, and that's clearly fantasy too. Why else would you use an accommodation address?

Dear Mr Galliard: 19th September
I understand. Had I suspected that your mail might be intercepted, I should never have written as openly as I did. We who know the truth must be ever on guard lest inadvertently we betray one another. No matter. This letter is coming to you by a trusty messenger, so you need fear no further trouble from it. I have taken the hint and changed my address – the one given here is indeed an accommodation address, so there is no need to worry that you may lead Them to me.

In future, when you want to contact me, send a postcard to the address given. Doesn't matter what you say, but include a date. My messenger will then make an excuse to call between 10 and 12 at night on that date, and will bring me any messages.

May the Light of Marekt shine upon your endeavours.

Yours sincerely,
Karolus

Dear Karolus: 1st October
I'm leaving this where I hope your messenger will find it. I daren't wait to speak with him. If you get this, run for your life – they're on to us. I was in the pub last night when a perfect stranger came up to me and started chatting. After a bit he asked me if I was the author of *The Argalian Wars*. I could hardly deny it, so I agreed that I was. Then he said to me, "You know, it would have made much better sense if it were the Lady Eldora that married Erlim – account for old Herelwind's defection." I laughed it off, saying that he was quite right, and that even authors couldn't think of everything, but it scared the hell out of me. I'd felt sure that such a blatant error would put the Watch off my trail if they happened to chance upon my book out of the hundreds published. Guess it serves me right for underestimating them.

Anyway, I'm getting out of here today, for good. Dammit, I was just starting to make some money at last.

Take care of yourself. May the One Light guide you, and may we meet at last in the Fields of Orwennen.
Yours,
John

Dear Mr Galliard: 10th October
Are you sure that you are quite sane? You appear to think that the trivial inventions in your novels are somehow real. Please stop bothering me with your paranoid fantasies. I am quite sure that no-one is after you, least of all some revenant from a drowned continent. Perhaps you should consult a doctor – of medicine, that is. For myself, I have no more time to waste on you.
Yours faithfully,
Karolus Mitnord
Emeritus Professor of Atlantean History
University of Claucht

Dear Karolus:

15th October
You've got to help me. I went on the run to protect the both of us, and now you're turning your back on me. I need a place to stay for a time – I daren't risk getting hold of any money till the hunt has died down. Write to me *poste restante* Brighton Central P.O.

You are the only one who can help me. In the name of the Triplets, I demand your aid.

Yours,
John

Dear Mr Galliard:

31st October
Professor Mitnord is abroad, but before he left he asked me to write to you recommending Fynun Farm near Poole as the answer to your problems. He also asked me to add that he will not be able to spare the time to reply to any further communications from you, and would therefore be grateful if you would cease troubling him.

Yours sincerely,

J. Marvel

Asst. to Prof. Mitnord

Dear Professor Mitnord:

13th November
I am sorry to trouble you, but we have here a patient by the name of John Galliard, who claims that he was recommended by you, and that you will vouch for his story that his life is in danger. He maintains that he has been corresponding with you for some time, but that he destroyed the letters "lest they fall into the wrong hands."

Whilst I would not normally bother you in such a case, I would in this instance be grateful for any information you can give us as we can get nothing out of him except his name and yours.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Goldberg M.D., M.Sc(Psych)

Director

Fynun Farm

Dear Dr Goldberg:

22nd November
I am afraid I can tell you very little about Mr Galliard. He is a writer of fantasy novels, and wrote to me seeking information about Atlantis myths. As you may know, I am generally recognized as the world's leading expert on "Lost Continent" subjects and attract many such correspondents.

Sadly, writers, like actors, sometimes lose the ability to distinguish between reality and their own creations. This appears to have happened in Mr Galliard's case, as he keeps writing to me for help in evading what he refers to as "The Watch Ward" – presumably characters from his novels. I did indeed suggest that you might be able to help him, as you were able to be of great assistance to an acquaintance of mine whose son was convinced that he was the last of the Numenoreans.

My intention in directing him to you was merely to ensure that he received the best possible care. I do apologize for not notifying you of his impending arrival, but I have just returned from a lecture tour of the Continent, and in the hurry of preparing for it I overlooked the matter.

I trust that this will clarify matters for you. I regret that I have no further information to offer you.

Yours sincerely,

Karolus Mitnord
Emeritus Professor of Atlantean History
University of Claucht

P.S. As his books are apparently best-sellers, there should be no problem in obtaining your fees, though you may of course need to obtain Power of Attorney.

Dear Professor Mitnord: 1st December
How can I thank you? At first when I came here I thought that you had tricked me into entering some kind of nuthouse, but now that I understand the situation, I'm just so grateful. Did you know that Arafel II, last of the Numenoreans is here? And Princess Elzetsa? And so many others I never dreamed of meeting! Sometimes I feel like crying for joy, it's just so wonderful here.

Dr Goldberg explained to me that it was your idea to set up this place under cover of a mental institution, and I must say I think it's brilliant. No-one's going to bother us here while we gather our forces for the Time That Must Come.

Thanks again. Hope you get down for a visit sometime, though I can see that might be dangerous. What a lonely task yours is, Xheldred – I hope you don't mind my calling you that, just this once. I'm assured that there is no danger of this letter falling into the wrong hands.

May the One Light shine always upon you.
Yours in honour,
Gantich
(John Galliard)

My Lord Hadrad: 21st December
Please be assured that the matter you mention need trouble you no longer. The Scribe Gantich is now safely lodged with all the others who have made the Breakthrough. A minor creature, to be sure, but his profession has a certain potential for disruption. There is little danger of his deciding to leave as his funds are assigned to the safe hands of Dr Goldberg, who continues to carry out his work in good faith despite his astonishment at the numbers who share similar delusions. He is, however, still determined to continue with his "experimental treatment" – as indeed he should, given the excellent salary and other funding he receives.

If I may be permitted a small boast, the device of placing together all those who Realize has turned out even better than I had hoped. They suspect nothing and stay there quite contentedly, spinning their plots on the basis of the false information provided by Your Grace's servants. Since they have all been educated from birth to believe that the Time is not due in their generation, they remain perfectly patient! Of course, they have no chance of persuading anyone to listen to them when they do realize their error, so I think I may safely predict that Your Grace will be returned to your Ancient Right, as anticipated, at the time of the Millennium.

May I take this opportunity to present to you, your lady and your noble family my warmest good wishes for Sunturn.
Your faithful servant,
Xheldred
Chief Watch Warden

Dear Dr Goldberg:

21st December

With reference to our recent correspondence, I can now confirm that your grant will be continued for another year. I must however warn you that unless some concrete results are forthcoming by the end of that period, it is unlikely to be renewed further. Grouping together those with similar delusions to live out their fantasies does indeed offer a most interesting extension of the work of Laing etc., but the Foundation cannot support such speculative work indefinitely. Indeed, only his lordship's warm personal interest has swayed the trustees into renewing for this year.

I appreciate that this is of necessity a long-term project if the demented are to realize for themselves the nature of their delusions, and am therefore glad to learn that the income from your patients will shortly be sufficient for you to keep going without external funding.

May I take this opportunity to offer you the compliments of the season, and wish you a happy and successful New Year.

Yours sincerely,
M. Browning
Secretary to the Trustees
Atlantis Foundation

Alethea Amsden was born in Scarborough in 1945, and has been a devotee of sf ever since she first read *The Lost Planet* by Angus McVicar in the mid-50s. Some years ago, she abandoned a high-powered career in computing and became a counsellor, but recently made a break to become a full-time writer. The above is her first published story. She lives with her husband in Norwich.

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The Cyberpunk Bust

Bruce Sterling

This article relates part of a strange American drama of high technology, fantasy, politics, ambition, confusion, and squalor. It has been known as "Operation Sun Devil," the largest and best-coordinated crackdown on computer mischief in American history. To the world of science fiction, it has gone by another name.

The instantly-legendary "Cyberpunk Bust" of March 1, 1990 intrigued and alarmed the science-fiction community. The circumstances were obscure, almost defying belief.

What possible reason could lead an American federal law enforcement agency to raid the headquarters of a science-fiction gaming company? Why did armed action-teams of city police, corporate security men, and federal agents roust two Texan computer-hackers from their beds at dawn, and then deliberately confiscate thousands of dollars' worth of computer equipment, including the hackers' common household telephones? And (to switch from the baldly technological to the quasi-literary) – why was an unpublished book called *G.U.R.P.S. Cyberpunk* seized by the U.S. Secret Service, declared a "manual for computer crime" and a blatant threat to American national security? These weird events were not parodies or fantasies; no, this was real.

The first order of business in untangling this bizarre drama is to understand the players – who come in entire teams. *Dramatis Personae*:

PLAYER NUMBER ONE: The Law Enforcement Agencies. America's defence against the threat of computer crime is a confusing hodgepodge of state, municipal, and federal agencies. Ranked first, by size and power, are the fearsome big-timers: the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), large, potent, and secretive organizations who, luckily, play almost no role in our story.

The active second rank of such agencies, though, is occupied by the smaller but highly-motivated United States Secret Service, famous throughout the world as the suited, mirrorshades-

toting, heavily-armed bodyguards of the President of the United States. Besides guarding high-ranking federal officials – a hazardous, challenging, and eminently necessary task – the U.S. Secret Service is also legally responsible for foiling counterfeiting, wire-fraud, and "computer abuse." These unrelated assignments are an historical accident of the rickety American justice system – but the Secret Service is fiercely aware of its duties, and jealous of its bureaucratic turf.

As the use of plastic money has spread, and their role as protectors of the currency has faded in importance, the Secret Service has moved with a will into the realm of electronic crime. Unlike the lordly FBI, CIA, and NSA, who generally can't be bothered with domestic computer mischief (see Clifford Stoll's computer-espionage best-seller, *The Cuckoo's Egg*, as evidence) the Secret Service is noted for its go-getting street-level enthusiasm.

The third rank of law enforcement are the minor actors: local "dedicated computer crime units." There are very few such groups, and they are pitifully undermanned. They must struggle hard for their funding and the vital light of publicity – it's difficult to make white-collar computer crime seem pressing, to an American public that lives in terror of armed and violent street-crime.

These local groups are small – often, one or two officers, computer hobbyists who have drifted into electronic crimebusting, because they alone are game to devote time and effort to this untrod law-enforcement frontier. California's Silicon Valley has three computer-crime units. There's one in Baltimore, one in Los Angeles, one in Dallas/Fort Worth, and a very active one in Phoenix, Arizona – all told, though, perhaps only forty people, nationwide.

The locals do have one great advantage, though. They all know one another. Though scattered across the country, they are linked by professional societies and computer modems, and have a commendable subcultural esprit-de-corps. And in the well-manned US Secret Service, they have willing national-level assistance.

PLAYER NUMBER TWO: The Telephone Companies. In the early 80s, in a spasm of Thatcherite free-market enthusiasm, America's telephone monopoly was privatized and pulverized. "Ma Bell," the national phone company, is now the regional "Baby Bells," who compete with one another and with upstart communications companies. But, as a class, they are all harassed by computer-hackers of various stripes, and they all maintain computer-security experts. In a lot of cases these "corporate security divisions" consist of just one or two guys – computer hobbyists, who drifted into the work. But, linked by modem and specialized security trade journals, they all know one another.

PLAYER NUMBER THREE: The Computer Hackers. The American hacker elite consists of about a hundred people, who all know one another. There are second and third-rank legions of minor so-called "hackers" – such as the "kodes kidz," who purloin telephone access codes so as to make free (ie, stolen) phone calls, and the despised and lowly "wares dudes" who copy and pirate software. But the princes of hackerdom – techies who skate the phone lines as a lifestyle, for fun and occasional illicit profit – hang out in loose, modem-connected gangs like the "Legion of Doom" and the "Masters of Destruction." The craft of hacking is taught through "bulletin-board systems," personal computers that carry electronic mail and can be accessed by phone. Hacker bulletin-boards generally sport grim, scary, sci-fi heavy metal names like BLACK ICE – PRIVATE or SPEED DEMON ELITE. Hackers also sport romantic and highly suspicious high-tech tough-guy monickers like "Necron 99," "Erik Bloodaxe," "Acid Phreak" and "Phiber Optik." This can be taken as a kind of cyberpunk folk-poetry – on the other hand, the Mafia sports colourful nicknames, too.

PLAYER NUMBER FOUR: The Simulation Gamers. Wargames and role-playing adventures are an old and honoured pastime, much favoured by professional military strategists and H.G. Wells, and now played by hundreds of

thousands of enthusiasts throughout North America, Europe and Japan. In today's market, many simulation games are computerized, making simulation gaming a favourite pastime of hackers, who dote on arcane intellectual challenges and the thrill of doing simulated mischief.

Modern simulation games frequently have a heavily science-fictional element. Over the past decade or so, fuelled by very respectable royalties, the world of simulation-gaming has increasingly permeated the world of science-fiction publishing. TSR Inc., proprietors of the best-known role-playing game, "Dungeons & Dragons," also own the venerable science-fiction magazine *Amazing*. Britain's Games Workshop, the second-largest of the major gaming companies, employs the editor of *Interzone*, and its "Warhammer" tie-in novels have been penned by several *Interzone* regulars. Games Workshop plays a peripheral but perhaps vital role in getting this very magazine into your hands, and keeping the tradition and subculture of British sf alive and viable.

Steve Jackson Games, Inc., of Austin, Texas, is a games company of the middle rank. Before the troubles, it employed fifteen people and grossed more than half a million dollars a year. SJG's Austin headquarters is a modest two-storey brick office-suite, cluttered with phones, photocopiers, fax machines and computers. A publisher's digs, it's littered with glossy promo brochures and dog-eared sf novels, and bustles with semi-organized activity. Attached to the offices is a large tin-roofed warehouse piled twenty feet high with cardboard boxes of product. This building was the site of the "Cyberpunk Bust."

A look at the company's wares, neatly stacked on endless rows of cheap shelving, quickly shows SJG's long involvement with the sf community. SJG's main product, the Generic Universal Role-Playing System or G.U.R.P.S., features licensed and adapted works from many genre writers. There is GURPS Witch World, GURPS Conan, GURPS Riverworld, GURPS Horseclans, many names eminently familiar to sf fans. GURPS Cyberpunk, though, was to be a different story.

PLAYER NUMBER FIVE: The Science-Fiction Writers. The "cyberpunk" sf writers are a small group of mostly college-educated white middle-class genre literateurs, without conspicuous criminal records, scattered throughout the US and Canada. Only one, Rudy Rucker, a professor of computer science in Silicon Valley, could class with even the humblest computer hacker. However, these writers all own computers and take an intense, public, and somewhat morbid

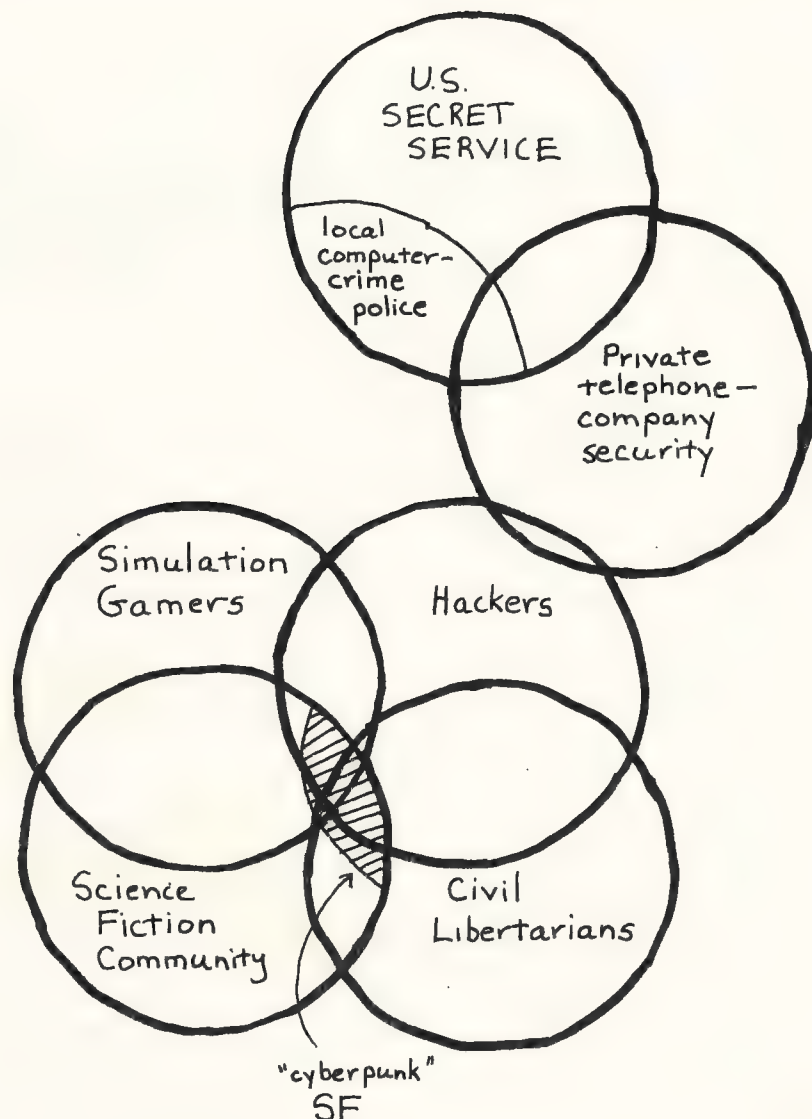


Fig 1: Sociocultural relationships in "Operation Sun Devil"

interest in the social ramifications of the information industry. Despite their small numbers, they all know one another, and are linked by antique print-medium publications with unlikely names like *Science Fiction Eye*, *IASFM*, *Omni* and *Interzone*.

PLAYER NUMBER SIX: The Civil Libertarians. This small but rapidly growing group consists of heavily politicized computer enthusiasts and heavily cyberneticized political activists: a mix of wealthy high-tech entrepreneurs, veteran West Coast troublemaking hippies, touchy journalists, and toney East Coast civil-rights lawyers. They are all getting to know one another.

At this point, a classic Venn Diagram may prove useful (see Figure 1). Overlaps between the circles demonstrate the relationships between the six players involved. Groups that strongly overlap can understand one another – or at least share a workable vocabulary. Groups that don't overlap

have the potential for explosive confrontation.

One early and possibly crucial such confrontation occurred in 1988 when an Arizona law-enforcement official, alertly prowling through the nets in search of wrongdoers, phoned up a hacker bulletin-board called BLACK ICE – PRIVATE, located "somewhere in the 607 area code." This was a board notorious even among hackers for the violence of its rhetoric, which discussed sabotage of phone-lines, drug-lab manufacturing techniques, and the assembly of home-made bombs, among other alarming topics.

Of course, the mere discussion of these notions is not illegal – many cyberpunk sf stories positively dote on such ideas, as do hundreds of spy thrillers and adventure novels. It was no coincidence that "ICE," or "Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics," was a term invented by cyberpunk writer Tom Maddox, and "BLACK ICE," or a computer-defence that fries the brain of the unwary trespasser, was a coinage of William Gibson.

A reference manual from the US National Institute of Justice, "Dedicated Computer Crime Units" by J. Thomas McEwen, suggests that federal attitudes toward bulletin-board systems are ambivalent at best. "There are several examples of how bulletin boards have been used in support of criminal activities... (B)ulletin boards were used to relay illegally obtained access codes into computer service companies. Paedophiles have been known to leave suggestive messages on bulletin boards, and other sexually oriented messages have been found on bulletin boards. Members of cults and sects have also communicated through bulletin boards. While the storing of information on bulletin boards may not be illegal, the use of bulletin boards has certainly advanced many illegal activities."

Here is a troubling concept indeed: invisible electronic pornography, to be printed-out at home and read by sects and cults. It makes a mockery of the traditional law-enforcement techniques concerning the publication and prosecution of smut. In fact, the prospect of large numbers of antisocial conspirators, congregating in the limbo of cyberspace without official oversight of any kind, is enough to trouble the sleep of anyone charged with maintaining public order.

This may be a conjectural problem at present; but the use of bulletin-boards to foment hacker mischief is real. Worse yet, the bulletin-boards themselves are linked, sharing their audience and spreading the wicked knowledge of vulnerabilities in the phone network and in a wide variety of academic, corporate and governmental computer-systems.

This strength of the hackers is also a weakness, however. If the boards are monitored by alert informants and/or officers, the whole wicked tangle can be seized all along its extended electronic vine, rather like harvesting pumpkins.

The war against hackers, including the "Cyberpunk Bust," was primarily a war against hacker bulletin-boards. It was, first and foremost, an attack against the enemy's means of information.

First, there were to be months of patient watching and compiling of dossiers. The national subculture of cyber-law: attorneys general, district attorneys, private corporate security, local police, the Secret Service – would be kept apprised, persuaded to action, and diplomatically martialled into effective strike position. Then, in a burst of energy and a glorious life-giving blaze of publicity, the whole nest of scofflaws would be wrenched up root-and-branch. Hopefully the damage would be permanent; if not, the swarming wretches would at least

keep their heads down.

In the meantime, however, Loyd Blankenship, an employee of Steve Jackson Games and an accomplished hacker, was contemplating a "cyberpunk" simulation-module for the flourishing GURPS gaming-system. The time seemed ripe for such a product, which had already been proven in the marketplace. The first games-company out of the gate, with a product boldly called "Cyberpunk" in defiance of possible infringement-of-copyright suits, had been an upstart group called R. Talsorian. Talsorian's "Cyberpunk" was an okay game, but the mechanics of the system sucked, and the nerds who wrote the manual were the kind of half-hip twits who wrote their own fake rock lyrics and, worse yet, published them. The game sold like crazy, though.

The next "cyberpunk" game published had been the even more successful "Shadowrun" by FASA Corporation. The mechanics of this game were fine, but the scenario was rendered moronic by the highly ideologically-incorrect presence of orcs, dwarves, trolls, magicians, and, God help us, dragons. No true cyberpunk fan could play this game without vomiting, despite FASA's nifty T-shirts and street-samurai lead figurines.

Drawn by the scent of money, other game companies were champing at the bit. Blankenship reasoned that the time had come for a real "cyberpunk" gaming book – one that the princes of computer-mischief in the Legion of Doom could read and play without laughing themselves sick. This book, GURPS Cyberpunk, would reek of culturally on-line authenticity.

Hot discussion soon raged on the Steve Jackson Games bulletin board, the "Illuminati BBS," named after an SJG game in which antisocial cults and sects war covertly for the domination of the world. Gamers and hackers alike loved this board, with its fully-detailed discussions of pastimes like SJG's "Car Wars," in which souped-up armoured hot-rods with rocket-launchers and heavy machine-guns do battle on the American highways of the future.

Blankenship himself ran his own private bulletin board, "The Phoenix Project," from his house. It had been ages – months, anyway – since the increasingly sedate Blankenship had last entered a public phone-booth without a supply of pocket-change, but his intellectual interest in computer-security remained intense. He was pleased to note the presence on "Phoenix" of a number of phone-company computer-security professionals, who engaged in friendly banter with heavy-dude hackers and eager telephone-wannabes. Hackers phoning into Phoenix could also be diverted to Illuminati, drumming-up business for SJG and lending their expertise to the

upcoming game.

Illuminati and Phoenix had become two ripe pumpkins on the criminal vine.

Hacker busts were nothing new. They had always been somewhat problematic for the authorities, since the offenders were generally high-IQ middle-class white juveniles with no criminal record. Public sympathy for the phone companies was limited at best. Trials often ended in puzzled dismissals or a slap-on-the-wrist. But the harassment suffered by "the business community" – always the best friend of law enforcement – was real, and highly annoying both financially and in its sheer social irritation.

Through experience, law enforcement had come up with an unorthodox but workable tactic. This was to avoid any trial at all, or even an accusation or arrest. Instead, sombre teams of grim police would swoop upon the teenage suspect's home and box up his computer as "evidence." If he was a good boy, and promised contritely to stay out of trouble forthwith, the highly expensive equipment might be returned to him in short order. If he was a hard-case, though, too bad. His play-toys could stay boxed-up for a couple of years.

The "Cyberpunk Bust" was an intensification of this standard technique. There were adults involved in this case, though, reeking of a hardened bad-attitude. Rumours had spread of a threat to the "911 System," emergency phone-lines used by the police themselves. In months to come this "threat" would be revealed as a complete phantom, but in the meantime, the law-enforcement community nationwide was livid at this insolent hacker threat to their own turf.

On March 1, 1990, 21-year-old Austin hacker Chris Goggans (aka "Erik Bloodaxe") was wakened by a police revolver levelled at his head. He watched, jittery, as Secret Service agents appropriated his 300-baud terminal and, rifling his files, discovered his highly dangerous source code for the notorious Internet Worm. Goggans, a wily operator, had suspected something of the like might be coming. All his best equipment had been hidden away elsewhere. They took his phone, though, and considered hauling off his hefty arcade-style PacMan game, before deciding that it was simply too heavy. Goggans was not charged with any crime. He was not arrested or ever charged with anything. The police still have what they took, though.

Blankenship was less wary. He had shut down "Phoenix" as rumours reached him of a nation-wide hacker crackdown. Still, the dawn raid roused him and his wife from bed in their underwear, and six Secret Servicemen, accompanied by a bemused



Bruce Sterling & William Gibson, cyberpunks

Austin cop and a corporate security official from Bellcore, made a rich haul. Off went the works, into the agents' white Chevrolet minivan: an IBM PC-AT clone with 4 meg of RAM and 120-meg hard disk, a Hewlett-Packard LaserJet II printer, a completely legitimate and highly expensive S.C.O. Xenix 286 operating system, Page-maker disks and documentation, the Microsoft Word word-processing program, Mrs Blankenship's incomplete academic thesis stored on disk, and the couple's telephone. All this property remains in police custody today.

While this group cleaned out the Blankenship home, a third team was off to Steve Jackson Games in the bleak light of dawn. The fact that this was a business headquarters, and not a private residence, did not deter the agents. It was still early; no one was at work yet. Summoned by radio, a policeman brought Blankenship's keys and the agents opened the building.

The exact details of the next events are unclear. The agents would not let anyone else into the building. Their search warrant, when produced, was unsigned. Apparently they brokefasted from the local "Whataburger," for the litter from hamburgers was found inside later. They also extensively sampled a bag of jellybeans kept by an SJG employee. Someone tore a "Dukakis for President" sticker from

the wall.

SJG functionaries, diligently showing up for the day's work, were met truculently. They watched in astonishment as agents wielding crowbars and screwdrivers emerged with captive machines. The agents wore blue nylon windbreakers with "SECRET SERVICE" stencilled across the back, with running-shoes and jeans. This was heavy physical work, not desk-jockey suit-and-tie stuff.

No one at Steve Jackson Games was arrested. No one was accused of any crime. There will be no cyberpunk show-trial. There were no charges. Everything appropriated was officially kept as "evidence" of crimes that were never specified.

Next day, Jackson visited the local Secret Service headquarters with a lawyer in tow. There was trouble over GURPS Cyberpunk, which had been discovered on the hard-disk of a seized machine. GURPS Cyberpunk, alleged a Secret Service agent to the astonished businessman Steve Jackson, was a "manual for computer crime."

"It's science fiction," Jackson said.

"No, this is real." This statement was repeated several times, by several agents. This is not a fantasy. No, this is real. Jackson's ominously accurate game had passed from pure fantasy into the impure fantasy of the political, the highly-publicized "reality" of a nation-spanning crackdown that was soon to spread to more than forty

people. So far it has produced a meagre three convictions, but a plethora of highly effective seizures.

GURPS Cyberpunk, now published and available from Steve Jackson Games at Box 18957, Austin, Texas 78760 USA, does discuss some of the commonplaces of computer-hacking, such as searching through trash for useful clues, or snitching passwords by boldly lying to gullible users. Reading it won't make you a hacker, any more than reading *Spycatcher* will make you an agent of MI5. Still, this bold insistence on authenticity has made GURPS Cyberpunk the *Satanic Verses* of simulation gaming, and it has made Steve Jackson the first martyr-to-the-cause for the computer world's civil libertarians. They have their martyr, they have their cause, they have an intelligent and determined opposition. Now they can rally; now the real fight starts. This is politics in America.

From the beginning, Steve Jackson declared that he had committed no crime, and had nothing to hide. Few believed him, for it seemed astonishing that such tremendous effort would be spent on someone entirely innocent. Surely there were a few stolen code-numbers in "Illuminati," a swiped credit-card number or two — something. Those who rallied to the defence of Jackson or the hackers were publicly warned that they would be caught with egg on their face when the real truth came out, "later." But "later" came and went. The fact is that Jackson was innocent of any crime. There was no case against him; his activities were entirely legal. He had simply been consorting with the wrong sort of people.

In fact he was the wrong sort of people. His attitude stank. He showed no contrition; he scoffed at authority; he gave aid and comfort to the enemy; he was trouble. The American law-enforcement community lacks the manpower and resources to prosecute hackers successfully, one by one, on the merits of the cases against them. The cyber-police have settled instead for a clever "hack" of the legal system: a quasi-legal tactic of seizure and "deterrence." Humiliate and harass a few brazen ringleaders, the philosophy goes, and the rest will fall into line. After all, most hackers are just kids. The few grown-ups among them are sociopathic geeks, not real players in the political and legal game. And in the final analysis, a small company like Jackson's lacks the resources to make any real trouble for the U.S. Secret Service.

But Jackson, with his conspiracy-soaked bulletin board and his seedy sf-fan computer-freak employees, is not "just a kid." He is a publisher, and he was battered by the police in the full light of national publicity, under the shocked gaze of journalists, gaming

fans, libertarian activists and millionaire computer entrepreneurs, many of whom are not "deterred," but genuinely aghast. What, reasons the author, is to prevent the Secret Service from carting off my own word-processor as "evidence" of some non-existent crime? What would I do, thinks the small-press owner, if someone took my laser-printer? Even the computer magnate in his private Lear-jet remembers his heroic days in Silicon Valley when he was soldering semilegal circuit-boards in a tin garage.

Hence the establishment of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (155 Second Street, Cambridge MA 02141). The sheriff had shown up in Dodge City to clean up that outlaw town, but the response of the Apaches was swift, and well-financed. Steve Jackson was provided with a high-powered lawyer specializing in Constitutional freedom-of-the-press issues. Faced with this, a markedly un-contrite Secret Service returned Jackson's machinery, after months of delay – thousands of dollars of business injury, from failure to meet deadlines and loss of computer-assisted production.

Half the company's employees were

sorrowfully laid-off. The remaining seven all work Stakhanovite hours now, collating, shipping, answering phones. Luckily, SJG's distributors, touched by the company's plight and feeling some natural subcultural solidarity, advanced him money to scrape along. At first, says Jackson, he was despondent, but too enraged to simply quit. Now, months on, he suspects he may yet pull through. Perhaps his unsought fame will be some recompense.

The general outcome has been a sorry one. Hackers have been publicly vilified and demonized as a national threat. "Cyberpunk," a literary term, is now a synonym for computer criminal. The cyber-police have leapt where angels fear to tread. The phone companies have badly overstated their case and deeply embarrassed their protectors. The wild frontier of cyberspace is becoming just another small town, with barbed-wire going up right and left.

The E.F.F. pays Jackson's legal bills and flies him here and there to tell his tale. This has been his story; the rest remains untold.

(Bruce Sterling)

Note: Bruce Sterling's previous "Comment" columns appeared in issues 37, 39 and 41 of *Interzone*.

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* are still readily available (except for issues 1, 5, 7 and 17). They cost £2.30 each inland (postage included), or £2.50 each overseas (USA: \$4 sea mail, or \$5 air mail). However, UK purchasers who buy **three or more** in one order may have them at **£1.95 each (i.e. post free)**.

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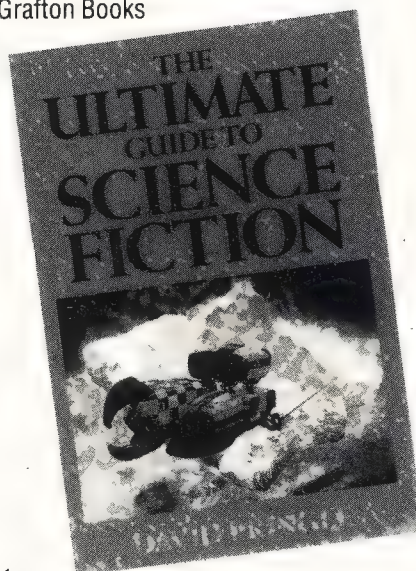
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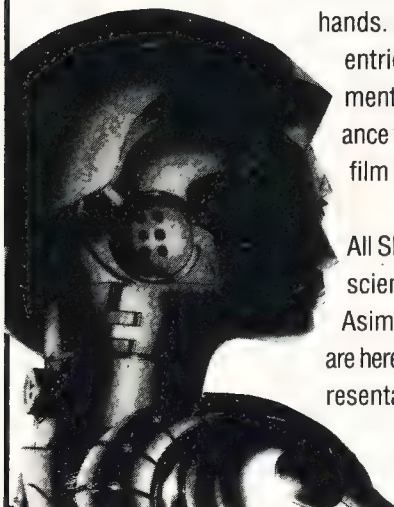
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When we were nine years old, Paula decided we should prick our thumbs, and let our blood flow into each other's veins.

I was scornful. "Why bother? Our blood's already exactly the same. We're already blood sisters."

She was unfazed. "I know that. That's not the point. It's the ritual that counts."

We did it in our bedroom, at midnight, by the light of a single candle. She sterilized the needle in the candle flame, then wiped it clean of soot with a tissue and saliva.

When we'd pressed the tiny, sticky wounds together, and recited some ridiculous oath from a third-rate children's novel, Paula blew out the candle. While my eyes were still adjusting to the dark, she added a whispered coda of her own: "Now we'll dream the same dreams, and share the same lovers, and die at the very same hour."

I tried to say, indignantly, "That's just not true!" but the darkness and the scent of the dead flame made the protest stick in my throat, and her words remained unchallenged.

As Dr Packard spoke, I folded the pathology report, into halves, into quarters, obsessively aligning the edges. It was far too thick for me to make a neat job of it; from the micrographs of the misshapen lymphocytes proliferating in my bone marrow, to the print-out of portions of the RNA sequence of the virus that had triggered the disease, thirty-two pages in all.

In contrast, the prescription, still sitting on the desk in front of me, seemed ludicrously flimsy and insubstantial. No match at all. The traditional – indecipherable – polysyllabic scrawl it bore was nothing but a decoration; the drug's name was reliably encrypted in the barcode below. There was no question of receiving the wrong medication by mistake. The question was, would the right one help me?

"Is that clear? Ms Rees? Is there anything you don't understand?"

I struggled to focus my thoughts, pressing hard on an intractable crease with my thumb. She'd explained the situation frankly, without resorting to jargon or euphemism, but I still had the feeling that I was missing

Greg Egan



Blood Sisters

something crucial. It seemed like every sentence she'd spoken had started one of two ways: "The virus..." or "The drug..."

"Is there anything I can do? Myself? To...improve the odds?"

She hesitated, but not for long. "No, not really. You're in excellent health, otherwise. Stay that way." She began to rise from her desk to dismiss me, and I began to panic.

"But, there must be *something*." I gripped the arms of my chair, as if afraid of being dislodged by force. Maybe she'd misunderstood me, maybe I hadn't made myself clear. "Should I...stop eating certain foods? Get more exercise? Get more sleep? I mean, there has to be *something* that will make a difference. And I'll do it, whatever it is. Please, just tell me—" My voice almost cracked, and I looked away, embarrassed. Don't ever start ranting like that again. Not ever.

"Ms Rees, I'm sorry. I know how you must be feeling. But the Monte Carlo diseases are all like this. In fact, you're exceptionally lucky; the WHO computer found eighty thousand people, worldwide, infected

with a similar strain. That's not enough of a market to support any hard-core research, but enough to have persuaded the pharmaceutical companies to rummage through their databases for something that might do the trick. A lot of people are on their own, infected with viruses that are virtually unique. Imagine how much useful information the health profession can give *them*." I finally looked up; the expression on her face was one of sympathy, tempered by impatience.

I declined the invitation to feel ashamed of my ingratitude. I'd made a fool of myself, but I still had a right to ask the question. "I understand all that. I just thought there might be something I could do. You say this drug might work, or it might not. If I could contribute, *myself*, to fighting this disease, I'd feel..."

What? More like a human being, and less like a test tube—a passive container in which the wonder drug and the wonder virus would fight it out between themselves.

"...better."

She nodded. "I know, but trust me, nothing you can

do would make the slightest difference. Just look after yourself as you normally would. Don't catch pneumonia. Don't gain or lose ten kilos. Don't do *anything* out of the ordinary. Millions of people must have been exposed to this virus, but the reason you're sick, and they're not, is a purely genetic matter. The cure will be just the same. The biochemistry that determines whether or not the drug will work for you isn't going to change if you start taking vitamin pills, or stop eating junk food – and I should warn you that going on one of those 'miracle-cure' diets will simply make you sick; the charlatans selling them ought to be in prison."

I nodded fervent agreement to that, and felt myself flush with anger. Fraudulent cures had long been my *bête noir* – although now, for the first time, I could almost understand why other Monte Carlo victims paid good money for such things: crackpot diets, meditation schemes, aroma therapy, self-hypnosis tapes, you name it. The people who peddled that garbage were the worst kind of cynical parasites, and I'd always thought of their customers as being either congenitally gullible, or desperate to the point of abandoning their wits, but there was more to it than that. When your life is at stake, you want to fight for it – with every ounce of your strength, with every cent you can borrow, with every waking moment. Taking one capsule, three times a day, just isn't *hard enough* – whereas the schemes of the most perceptive con-men were sufficiently arduous (or sufficiently expensive) to make the victims feel that they were engaged in the kind of struggle that the prospect of death requires.

This moment of shared anger cleared the air completely. We were on the same side, after all; I'd been acting like a child. I thanked Dr Packard for her time, picked up the prescription, and left.

On my way to the pharmacy, though, I found myself almost wishing that she'd lied to me – that she'd told me my chances would be vastly improved if I ran ten kilometres a day and ate raw seaweed with every meal – but then I angrily recoiled, thinking: Would I really want to be deceived "for my own good"? If it's down to my DNA, it's down to my DNA, and I ought to expect to be told that simple truth, however unpalatable I find it – and I ought to be grateful that the medical profession has abandoned its old patronizing, paternalistic ways.

I was twelve years old when the world learnt about the Monte Carlo project.

A team of biological warfare researchers (located just a stone's throw from Las Vegas – alas, the one in New Mexico, not the one in Nevada) had decided that designing viruses was just too much hard work (especially when the Star Wars boys kept hogging the supercomputers). Why waste hundreds of PhD-years – why expend any intellectual effort whatsoever – when the time-honoured partnership of blind mutation and natural selection was all that was required?

Speeded up substantially, of course.

They'd developed a three-part system: a bacterium, a virus, and a line of modified human lymphocytes. A stable portion of the viral genome allowed it to reproduce in the bacterium, while rapid mutation of the rest of the virus was achieved by neatly corrupting the transcription error repair enzymes. The lymphocytes had been altered to vastly amplify the reproduc-

tive success of any mutant which managed to infect them, causing it to out-breed those which were limited to using the bacterium.

The theory was, they'd set up a few trillion copies of this system, like row after row of little biological poker machines, spinning away in their underground lab, and just wait to harvest the jackpots.

The theory also included the best containment facilities in the world, and five hundred and twenty people all sticking scrupulously to official procedure, day after day, month after month, without a moment of carelessness, laziness or forgetfulness. Apparently, nobody bothered to compute the probability of that.

The bacterium was supposed to be unable to survive outside artificially beneficent laboratory conditions, but a mutation of the virus came to its aid, filling in for the genes that had been snipped out to make it vulnerable.

They wasted too much time using ineffectual chemicals before steeling themselves to nuke the site. By then, the winds had already made any human action – short of melting half a dozen states, not an option in an election year – irrelevant.

The first rumours proclaimed that we'd all be dead within a week. I can clearly recall the mayhem, the looting, the suicides (second-hand on the TV screen; our own neighbourhood remained relatively tranquil – or numb). States of emergency were declared around the world. Planes were turned away from airports, ships (which had left their home ports months before the leak) were burnt in the docks. Harsh laws were rushed in everywhere, to protect public order and public health.

Paula and I got to stay home from school for a month. I offered to teach her programming; she wasn't interested. She wanted to go swimming, but the beaches and pools were all closed. That was the summer that I finally managed to hack into a Pentagon computer – just an office supplies purchasing system, but Paula was suitably impressed (and neither of us had ever guessed that paperclips were *that* expensive).

We didn't believe we were going to die – at least, not within a week – and we were right. When the hysteria died down, it soon became apparent that only the virus and the bacterium had escaped, and without the modified lymphocytes to fine-tune the selection process, the virus had mutated away from the strain which had caused the initial deaths.

However, the cosy symbiotic pair is now found all over the world, endlessly churning out new mutations. Only a tiny fraction of the strains produced are infectious in humans, and only a fraction of those are potentially fatal.

A mere hundred or so a year.

On the train home, the sun seemed to be in my eyes no matter which way I turned – somehow, every surface in the carriage caught its reflection. The glare made a headache which had been steadily growing all afternoon almost unbearable, so I covered my eyes with my forearm and faced the floor. With my other hand, I clutched the brown paper bag that held the small glass vial of red-and-black capsules that would or wouldn't save my life.

Cancer. Viral leukaemia. I pulled the creased pathology report from my pocket, and flipped through

it one more time. The last page hadn't magically changed into a happy ending—an oncovirology expert system's declaration of a sure-fire cure. The last page was just the bill for all the tests. Twenty-seven thousand dollars.

At home, I sat and stared at my work station.

Two months before, when a routine quarterly examination (required by my health insurance company, ever eager to dump the unprofitable sick) had revealed the first signs of trouble, I'd sworn to myself that I'd keep on working, keep on living exactly as if nothing had changed. The idea of indulging in a credit spree, or a world trip, or some kind of self-destructive binge, held no attraction for me at all. Any such final fling would be an admission of defeat. I'd go on a fucking world trip to celebrate my cure, and not before.

I had plenty of contract work stacked up, and that pathology bill was already accruing interest. Yet for all that I needed the distraction—for all that I needed the money—I sat there for three whole hours, and did nothing but brood about my fate. Sharing it with eighty thousand strangers scattered about the world was no great comfort.

Then it finally struck me. *Paula*. If I was vulnerable for genetic reasons, then so was she.

For identical twins, in the end we hadn't done too bad a job of pursuing separate lives. She had left home at sixteen, to tour central Africa, filming the wildlife, and—at considerably greater risk—the poachers. Then she'd gone to the Amazon, and become caught up in the land rights struggle there. After that, it was a bit of a blur; she'd always tried to keep me up to date with her exploits, but she moved too fast for my sluggish mental picture of her to follow.

I'd never left the country; I hadn't even moved house in a decade.

She came home only now and then, on her way between continents, but we'd stayed in touch electronically, circumstances permitting. (They take away your SatPhone in Bolivian prisons.)

The telecommunications multinationals all offer their own expensive services for contacting someone when you don't know in advance what country they're in. The advertising suggests that it's an immensely difficult task; the fact is, every SatPhone's location is listed in a central database, which is kept up to date by pooling information from all the regional satellites. Since I happened to have "acquired" the access codes to consult that database, I could phone Paula directly, wherever she was, without paying the ludicrous surcharge. It was more a matter of nostalgia than miserliness; this minuscule bit of hacking was a token gesture, proof that in spite of impending middle age, I wasn't yet terminally law-abiding, conservative and dull.

I'd automated the whole procedure long ago. The database said she was in Gabon; my program calculated local time, judged ten twenty-three p.m. to be civilized enough, and made the call. Seconds later, she was on the screen.

"Karen! How are you? You look like shit. I thought you were going to call last week—what happened?"

The image was perfectly clear, the sound clean and undistorted (fibre-optic cables might be scarce in central Africa, but geosynchronous satellites are directly overhead). As soon as I set eyes on her, I felt sure she didn't have the virus. She was right—I looked

half-dead—whereas she was as animated as ever. Half a lifetime spent outdoors meant her skin had aged much faster than mine—but there was always a glow of energy, of purpose, about her that more than compensated.

She was close to the lens, so I couldn't see much of the background, but it looked like a fibreglass hut, lit by a couple of hurricane lamps; a step up from the usual tent.

"I'm sorry, I didn't get around to it. Gabon? Weren't you in Ecuador—?"

"Yes, but I met Mohammed. He's a botanist. From Indonesia. Actually, we met in Bogota; he was on his way to a conference in Mexico—"

"But—"

"Why Gabon? This is where he was going next, that's all. There's a fungus here, attacking the crops, and I couldn't resist coming along..."

I nodded, bemused, through ten minutes of convoluted explanations, not paying too much attention; in three months' time it would all be ancient history. Paula survived as a freelance pop-science journalist, darting around the globe writing articles for magazines, and scripts for TV programmes, on the latest ecological troublespots. To be honest, I had severe doubts that this kind of predigested eco-babble did the planet any good, but it certainly made her happy. I envied her that. I could not have lived her life—in no sense was she the woman I "might have been"—but nonetheless it hurt me, at times, to see in her eyes the kind of sheer excitement that I hadn't felt, myself, for a decade.

My mind wandered while she spoke. Suddenly, she was saying, "Karen? Are you going to tell me what's wrong?"

I hesitated. I had originally planned to tell no one, not even her, and now my reason for calling her seemed absurd—she couldn't have leukaemia, it was unthinkable. Then, without even realizing that I'd made the decision, I found myself recounting everything in a dull, flat voice. I watched with a strange feeling of detachment the changing expression on her face; shock, pity, then a burst of fear when she realized—far sooner than I would have done—exactly what my predicament meant for her.

What followed was even more awkward and painful than I could have imagined. Her concern for me was genuine—but she would not have been human if the uncertainty of her own position had not begun to prey on her at once, and knowing that made all her fussing seem contrived and false.

"Do you have a good doctor? Someone you can trust?"

I nodded.

"Do you have someone to look after you? Do you want me to come home?"

I shook my head, irritated. "No. I'm all right. I'm being looked after, I'm being treated. But you have to get tested as soon as possible." I glared at her, exasperated. I no longer believed that she could have the virus, but I wanted to stress the fact that I'd called her to warn her, not to fish for sympathy—and somehow, that finally struck home. She said, quietly, "I'll get tested today. I'll go straight into town. Okay?"

I nodded. I felt exhausted, but relieved; for a moment, all the awkwardness between us melted away.

"You'll let me know the results?"

She rolled her eyes. "Of course I will."

I nodded again. "Okay."

"Karen. Be careful. Look after yourself."

"I will. You too." I hit the ESCAPE key.

Half an hour later, I took the first of the capsules, and climbed into bed. A few minutes later, a bitter taste crept up into my throat.

Telling Paula was essential. Telling Martin was insane. I'd only known him six months, but I should have guessed exactly how he'd take it.

"Move in with me. I'll look after you."

"I don't need to be looked after."

He hesitated, but only slightly. "Marry me."

"Marry you? Why? Do you think I have some desperate need to be married before I die?"

He scowled. "Don't talk like that. I love you. Don't you understand that?"

I laughed. "I don't mind being pitied – people always say it's degrading, but I think it's a perfectly normal response – but I don't want to have to live with it twenty-four hours a day." I kissed him, but he kept on scowling. At least I'd waited until after we'd had sex before breaking the news; if not, he probably would have treated me like porcelain.

He turned to face me. "Why are you being so hard on yourself? What are you trying to prove? That you're super-human? That you don't need anyone?"

"Listen. You've known from the very start that I need independence and privacy. What do you want me to say? That I'm terrified? Okay. I am. But I'm still the same person. I still need the same things." I slid one hand across his chest, and said as gently as I could, "So thanks for the offer, but no thanks."

"I don't mean very much to you, do I?"

I groaned, and pulled a pillow over my face. I thought: *Wake me when you're ready to fuck me again. Does that answer your question?* I didn't say it out loud, though.

A week later, Paula phoned me. She had the virus. Her white cell count was up, her red cell count was down – the numbers she quoted sounded just like my own from the month before. They'd even put her on the very same drug. That was hardly surprising, but it gave me an unpleasant, claustrophobic feeling, when I thought about what it meant:

We would both live, or we would both die.

In the days that followed, this realization began to obsess me. It was like voodoo, like some curse out of a fairy tale – or the fulfilment of the words she'd uttered, the night we became "blood sisters." We had never dreamed the same dreams, we'd certainly never loved the same men, but now... it was as if we were being punished, for failing to respect the forces that bound us together.

Part of me knew this was bullshit. *Forces that bound us together!* It was mental static, the product of stress, nothing more. The truth, though, was just as oppressive: the biochemical machinery would grind out its identical verdict on both of us, for all the thousands of kilometres between us, for all that we had forged separate lives in defiance of our genetic unity.

I tried to bury myself in my work. To some degree, I succeeded – if the grey stupor produced by eighteen-hour days in front of a terminal could really be considered a success.

I began to avoid Martin; his puppy-dog concern was just too much to bear. Perhaps he meant well, but I didn't have the energy to justify myself to him, over and over again. Perversely, at the very same time, I missed our arguments terribly; resisting his excessive mothering had at least made me feel strong, if only in contrast to the helplessness he seemed to expect of me.

I phoned Paula every week at first, but then gradually less and less often. We ought to have been ideal confidantes; in fact, nothing could have been less true. Our conversations were redundant; we already knew what the other was thinking, far too well. There was no sense of unburdening, just a suffocating, monotonous feeling of recognition. We took to trying to outdo each other in affecting a veneer of optimism, but it was a depressingly transparent effort. Eventually, I thought: when – if – I get the good news, I'll call her; until then, what's the point? Apparently, she came to the same conclusion.

All through childhood, we were forced together. We loved each other, I suppose, but... we were always in the same classes at school, bought the same clothes, given the same Christmas and birthday presents – and we were always sick at the same time, with the same ailment, for the same reason. When she left home, I was envious, and horribly lonely for a while, but then I felt a surge of joy, of liberation, because I knew that I had no real wish to follow her, and I knew that from then on, our lives could only grow further apart.

Now, it seemed that had all been an illusion. We would live or die together, and all our efforts to break the bonds had been in vain.

About four months after the start of treatment, my blood counts began to turn around. I was more terrified than ever of my hopes being dashed, and I spent all my time battling to keep myself from premature optimism. I didn't dare ring Paula; I could think of nothing worse than leading her to think that we were cured, and then turning out to have been mistaken. Even when Dr Packard – cautiously, almost begrudgingly – admitted that things were looking up, I told myself that she might have relented from her policy of unflinching honesty and decided to offer me some palliative lies.

One morning I woke, not yet convinced that I was cured, but sick of feeling I had to drown myself in gloom for fear of being disappointed. If I wanted absolute certainty, I'd be miserable all my life; a relapse would always be possible, or a whole new virus could come along.

It was a cold, dark morning, pouring with rain outside, but as I climbed, shivering, out of bed, I felt more cheerful than I had since the whole thing had begun.

There was a message in my work station mailbox, tagged CONFIDENTIAL. It took me thirty seconds to recall the password I needed, and all the while my shivering grew worse.

The message was from the Chief Administrator of the Libreville People's Hospital, offering his or her condolences on the death of my sister, and requesting instructions for the disposal of the body.

I don't know what I felt first. Disbelief. Guilt. Confusion. Fear. How could she have died, when I was so close to recovery? How could she have died without a word to me? *How could I have let her die alone?*



I walked away from the terminal, and slumped against the cold brick wall.

The worst of it was, I suddenly knew why she'd stayed silent. She must have thought that I was dying, too, and that was the one thing we'd both feared most of all: dying together. In spite of everything, dying together, as if we were one.

How could the drug have failed her, and worked for me? *Had it worked for me?* For a moment of sheer paranoia, I wondered if the hospital had been faking my test results, if in fact I was on the verge of death, myself. That was ludicrous, though.

Why, then, had Paula died? There was only one possible answer. She should have come home – I should have *made her* come home. How could I have let her stay there, in a tropical, Third World country, with her immune system weakened, living in a fibre-glass hut, without proper sanitation, probably malnourished? I should have sent her the money, I should have sent her the ticket, I should have flown out there in person and dragged her back home.

Instead, I'd kept her at a distance. Afraid of us dying together, afraid of the curse of our sameness, I'd let her die alone.

I tried to cry, but something stopped me. I sat in the kitchen, sobbing drily. I was worthless. I'd killed her with my superstition and cowardice. I had no right to be alive.

I spent the next fortnight grappling with the legal and administrative complexities of death in a foreign land. Paula's will requested cremation, but said nothing about where it was to take place, so I arranged for her body and belongings to be flown home. The

service was all but deserted; our parents had died a decade before, in a car crash, and although Paula had had friends all over the world, few were able to make the trip.

Martin came, though. When he put an arm around me, I turned and whispered to him angrily, "You didn't even know her. What the hell are you doing here?" He stared at me for a moment, hurt and baffled, then walked off without a word.

I can't pretend I wasn't grateful, when Packard announced that I was cured, but my failure to rejoice out loud must have puzzled even her. I might have told her about Paula, but I didn't want to be fed cheap clichés about how irrational it was of me to feel guilty for surviving.

She was dead. I was growing stronger by the day; often sick with guilt and depression, but more often simply numb. That might easily have been the end of it.

Following the instructions in the will, I sent most of her belongings – notebooks, disks, audio and video tapes – to her agent, to be passed on to the appropriate editors and producers, to whom some of it might be of use. All that remained was clothing, a minute quantity of jewellery and cosmetics, and a handful of odds and ends. Including a small glass vial of red-and-black capsules.

I don't know what possessed me to take one of the capsules. I had half a dozen left of my own, and Packard had shrugged when I'd asked if I should finish them, and said that it couldn't do me any harm.

There was no aftertaste. Every time I'd swallowed

my own, within minutes there'd been a bitter after-taste.

I broke open a second capsule and put some of the white powder on my tongue. It was entirely without flavour. I ran and grabbed my own supply, and sampled one the same way; it tasted so vile it made my eyes water.

I tried, very hard, not to leap to any conclusions. I knew perfectly well that pharmaceuticals were often mixed with inert substances, and perhaps not necessarily the same ones all the time – but why would something *bitter* be used for that purpose? The taste had to come from the drug itself. The two vials bore the same manufacturer's name and logo. The same brand name. The same generic name. The same formal chemical name for the active ingredient. The same product code, down to the very last digit. Only the batch numbers were different.

The first explanation that came to mind was corruption. Although I couldn't recall the details, I was sure that I'd read about dozens of cases of officials in the health care systems of developing countries diverting pharmaceuticals for resale on the black market. What better way to cover up such a theft than to replace the stolen product with something else – something cheap, harmless, and absolutely useless? The gelatin capsules themselves bore nothing but the manufacturer's logo, and since the company probably made at least a thousand different drugs, it would not have been too hard to find something cheaper, with the same size and colouration.

I had no idea what to do with this theory. Anonymous bureaucrats in a distant country had killed my sister, but the prospect of finding out who they were, let alone seeing them brought to justice, were infinitesimally small. Even if I'd had real, damning evidence, what was the most I could hope for? A meekly phrased protest from one diplomat to another.

I had one of Paula's capsules analysed. It cost me a fortune, but I was already so deeply in debt that I didn't much care.

It was full of a mixture of soluble inorganic compounds. There was no trace of the substance described on the label, nor of anything else with the slightest biological activity. It wasn't a cheap substitute drug, chosen at random.

It was a placebo.

I stood with the print-out in my hand for several minutes, trying to come to terms with what it meant. Simple greed I could have understood, but there was an utterly inhuman coldness here that I couldn't bring myself to swallow. Someone must have made an honest mistake. *Nobody* could be so callous.

Then Packard's words came back to me. "Just look after yourself as you normally would. Don't do anything out of the ordinary."

Oh no, Doctor. Of course not, Doctor. Wouldn't want to go spoiling the experiment with any messy, extraneous, uncontrolled factors...

I contacted an investigative journalist, one of the best in the country. I arranged a meeting in a small café on the edge of town.

I drove out there – terrified, angry, triumphant – thinking I had the scoop of the decade, thinking I had dynamite, thinking I was Meryl Streep playing Karen

Silkwood. I was dizzy with sweet thoughts of revenge. Heads were going to roll.

Nobody tried to run me off the road. The café was deserted, and the waiter barely listened to our orders, let alone our conversation.

The journalist was very kind. She calmly explained the facts of life.

In the aftermath of the Monte Carlo disaster, a lot of legislation had been passed to help deal with the emergency – and a lot of legislation had been repealed. As a matter of urgency, new drugs to treat the new diseases had to be developed and assessed, and the best way to ensure that was to remove the cumbersome regulations that had made clinical trials so difficult and expensive.

In the old "double-blind" trials, neither the patients nor the investigators knew who was getting the drug and who was getting a placebo; the information was kept secret by a third party (or a computer). Any improvement observed in the patients who were given the placebo could then be taken into account, and the drug's true efficacy measured.

There were two small problems with this traditional approach. Firstly, telling a patient that there's only a fifty-fifty chance that they've been given a potentially life-saving drug subjects them to a lot of stress. Of course, the treatment and control groups were affected equally, but in terms of predicting what would happen when the drug was finally put out on the market, it introduced a lot of noise into the data. Which side-effects were real, and which were artifacts of the patients' uncertainty?

Secondly – and more seriously – it had become increasingly difficult to find people willing to volunteer for placebo trials. When you're dying, you don't give a shit about the scientific method. You want the maximum possible chance of surviving. Untested drugs will do, if there is no known, certain cure – but why accept a further halving of the odds, to satisfy some technocrat's obsession with details?

Of course, in the good old days the medical profession could lay down the law to the unwashed masses: *Take part in this double-blind trial, or crawl away and die.* AIDS had changed all that, with black markets for the latest untried cures, straight from the labs to the streets, and intense politicization of the issues.

The solution to both flaws was obvious.

You lie to the patients.

No bill had been passed to explicitly declare that "triple-blind" trials were legal. If it had, people might have noticed, and made a fuss. Instead, as part of the "reforms" and "rationalization" that came in the wake of the disaster, all the laws that might have made them illegal had been removed or watered down. At least, it looked that way – no court had yet been given the opportunity to pass judgement.

"How could any doctor *do that*? Lie like that! How could they justify it, even to themselves?"

She shrugged. "How did they ever justify double-blind trials? A good medical researcher has to care more about the quality of the data than about any one person's life. And if a double-blind trial is good, a triple-blind trial is better. The data is guaranteed to be better, you can see that, can't you? And the more accurately a drug can be assessed, well, perhaps in the long run, the more lives can be saved."



"Oh, *crap!* The placebo effect isn't that powerful. It just isn't that important! Who cares if it's not precisely taken into account? Anyway, two potential cures could still be compared, one treatment against another. That would tell you which drug would save the most lives, without any need for placebos —"

"That is done sometimes, although the more prestigious journals look down on those studies; they're less likely to be published —"

I stared at her. "How can you know all this and do nothing? The media could blow it wide open! If you let people know what's going on..."

She smiled thinly. "I could publicize the observation that these practices are now, theoretically, legal. Other people have done that, and it doesn't exactly make headlines. But if I printed any *specific* facts about an actual triple-blind trial, I'd face a half-million-dollar fine, and twenty-five years in prison, for endangering public health. Not to mention what they'd do to my publisher. All the 'emergency' laws brought in to deal with the Monte Carlo leak are still active."

"But that was twenty years ago!"

She drained her coffee and rose. "Don't you recall what the experts said at the time?"

"No."

"The effects will be with us for generations."

It took me four months to penetrate the drug manufacturer's network.

I eavesdropped on the data flow of several company executives who chose to work from home. It didn't take long to identify the least computer-literate.

A real bumbling fool, who used ten-thousand-dollar spreadsheet software to do what the average five-year-old could have done without fingers and toes. I watched his clumsy responses when the spreadsheet package gave him error messages. He was a gift from heaven; he simply didn't have a clue.

And, best of all, he was forever running a tediously unimaginative pornographic video game.

If the computer said "Jump!" he'd say "Promise not to tell?"

I spent a fortnight minimizing what he had to do; it started out at seventy keystrokes, but I finally got it down to twenty-three.

I waited until his screen was at its most compromising, then I suspended his connection to the network, and took its place myself.

FATAL SYSTEM ERROR! TYPE THE FOLLOWING TO RECOVER:

He botched it the first time. I rang alarm bells, and repeated the request. The second time, he got it right.

The first multi-key combination I had him strike took the work station right out of its operating system into its processor's microcode debugging routine. The hexadecimal that followed, gibberish to him, was a tiny program to dump all of the work station's memory down the communications line, right into my lap.

If he told anyone with any sense what had happened, suspicion would be aroused at once — but would he risk being asked to explain just what he was running when the "bug" occurred? I doubted it.

I already had his passwords. Included in the work station's memory was an algorithm which told me

precisely how to respond to the network's security challenges.

I was in.

The rest of their defences were trivial, at least so far as my aims were concerned. Data that might have been useful to their competitors was well-shielded, but I wasn't interested in stealing the secrets of their latest haemorrhoid cure.

I could have done a lot of damage. Arranged for their backups to be filled with garbage. Arranged for the gradual deviation of their accounts from reality, until reality suddenly intruded in the form of bankruptcy – or charges of tax fraud. I considered a thousand possibilities, from the crudest annihilation of data to the slowest, most insidious forms of corruption.

In the end, though, I restrained myself. I knew the fight would soon become a political one, and any act of petty vengeance on my part would be sure to be dredged up and used to discredit me, to undermine my cause.

So I did only what was absolutely necessary.

I located the files containing the names and addresses of everyone who had been unknowingly participating in triple-blind trials of the company's products. I arranged for them all to be notified of what had been done to them. There were over two hundred thousand people, spread all around the world – but I found a swollen executive slush fund which easily covered the communications bill.

Soon, the whole world would know of our anger, would share in our outrage and grief. Half of us were sick or dying, though, and before the slightest whisper of protest was heard, my first objective had to be to save whoever I could.

I found the program that allocated medication or placebo. The program that had killed Paula, and thousands of others, for the sake of sound experimental technique.

I altered it. A very small change. I added one more lie.

All the reports it generated would continue to assert that half the patients involved in clinical trials were being given the placebo. Dozens of exhaustive, impressive files would continue to be created, containing data entirely consistent with this lie. Only one small file, never read by humans, would be different. The file controlling the assembly line robots would instruct them to put medication in every vial of every batch.

From triple-blind to quadruple-blind. One more lie, to cancel out the others, until the time for deception was finally over.

Martin came to see me.

"I heard about what you're doing. T.I.M. Truth in Medicine." He pulled a newspaper clipping from his pocket. "'A vigorous new organization dedicated to the eradication of quackery, fraud and deception in both alternative and conventional medicine.' Sounds like a great idea."

"Thanks."

He hesitated. "I heard you were looking for a few more volunteers. To help around the office."

"That's right."

"I could manage four hours a week."

I laughed. "Oh, could you really? Well, thanks very much, but I think we'll cope without you."

For a moment, I thought he was going to walk out, but then he said, not so much hurt as simply baffled, "Do you want volunteers, or not?"

"Yes, but –" But what? If he could swallow enough pride to offer, I could swallow enough pride to accept.

I signed him up for Wednesday afternoons.

I have nightmares about Paula, now and then. I wake smelling the ghost of a candle flame, certain that she's standing in the dark beside my pillow, a solemn-eyed nine-year-old child again, mesmerized by our strange condition.

That child can't haunt me, though. She never died. She grew up, and grew apart from me, and she fought for our separateness harder than I ever did. What if we had "died at the very same hour"? It would have signified nothing, changed nothing. Nothing could have reached back and robbed us of our separate lives, our separate achievements and failures.

I realize, now, that the blood oath that seemed so ominous to me was nothing but a joke to Paula, her way of mocking the very idea that our fates could be entwined. How could I have taken so long to see that?

It shouldn't surprise me, though. The truth – and the measure of her triumph – is that I never really knew her.

Greg Egan makes his seventh appearance in *Interzone* with the above story. The first was with "Mind Vampires" (issue 18), and the last was with "Axiomatic" (issue 41). We hope that there will be at least seven more from him in the next two or three years. He is 29 years old, lives in Perth, Australia, and continues to write furiously.

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Workshops and Writing

A Personal Response to Sterling's 'A Workshop Lexicon' by David V. Barrett

Bruce Sterling's "A Workshop Lexicon" in *Interzone* 39 is an excellent teaching aid, and should be required reading for all writers, not just those in the science-fiction field. But.

There is a great danger in saying "You must not do this" or "You must at all costs avoid doing that"; or This or That is a sign of bad or lazy or amateur or immature writing. Yes, there are rules, but rules for writers must be guidelines – in the sense of guide-ropes along a difficult path – rather than chains constricting the writer.

I'm not saying there shouldn't be rules, or that they can happily be ignored. Years ago when I taught secondary-school English I insisted on teaching a certain amount of formal grammar, against the educational ethos of the time which said "Let them write what they want, how they want; children must express themselves, and rules are only restrictions that hem them in." Twaddle. Writing is a form of communication, and there are certain conventions which should (usually) be observed to ensure that communication between writer and reader is not impaired. I'm talking about absolute basics like capital letters, full stops, paragraphing *et al*, and also about complex points of style. Free expression is useless if it doesn't convey the sense and spirit the writer intends to the reader.

But.

Every writer – every artist of any sort – breaks the "rules" from time to time, quite deliberately, to achieve a particular effect. Once you know the rules and understand the reasons for them, once they are second nature, then you can break them to effect. Listen to any great musician – Richard Thompson on guitar, or Danny Thompson (no relation) on double bass, for example. They break every rule of composition and performance ever formulated; but they know what they're doing, and why, and the effect is stunning. Writing is just the same.

There are several dangers inherent in Sterling's assorted rules and strictures. For one, writers may feel bound by them absolutely, and produce clinically "correct" stories with no soul to them; this is a typically

American writing-school problem.

There is a place for over-the-top, florid, baroque writing; there is a place for "white room" stories or scenes or openings to stories; sometimes an infodump is the most effective way of imparting that information in that story; there is a place for emotive poetic prose, for alliteration, for rhythm of writing, even for rhyme, though for some reason workshops seem to hate anything that smacks of euphony; there is even a place, getting back to basics, for sentences without verbs (okay, so they're not strictly sentences) or stream-of-consciousness writing without punctuation or capital letters. If used deliberately, for a certain effect, and if used well, all of these can be valuable additions to the writer's armoury. But if you take the Lexicon at face value, they are, quite simply, always wrong.

Sterling condemns, for just one example, "pushbutton words" which "evoke a cheap emotional response... such bits of bogus lyricism as 'star,' 'dream,' 'dance,' 'song,' 'tears,' and 'poet.'" Does he actually mean writers should never use emotively loaded words? Surely not; he's not that stupid. But there are writers, and not just beginners, who will take such a piece of advice as a god-given law – and their writing will be impoverished for it. The point is, to use them rightly.

True, all writers are lazy or thoughtless at times, and slip up and let clichéd writing, idiot plots, bogus alternatives etc slip into their work. Workshops are an excellent way of having one's carelessness, laziness, personal bad habits and sheer poor writing pointed out; it's painful, but invaluable. But beware lists of "things to avoid at all costs"; inexperienced critics can make the assumption that every use of anything from Sterling's Workshop Lexicon is automatically bad writing. They fall into push-button criticism, picking up one of Sterling's neat categories and being blinded to what it is actually doing within a story, and why the writer has quite deliberately used it.

An example from an SF writers' conference a few years ago, deliberately not naming the writer or the critic (neither was myself): one story by

an experienced writer was written in the present tense, and a by no means inexperienced critic objected. "This is a 1960s affectation; this is not tenable in today's writing; I urge you never to do this..." Blinded by a pushbutton response to what was perceived as a stylistic quirk, this critic (and several others in that workshop) failed to realize that the story *had* to be written in the present tense for absolutely vital plot reasons; as a result they totally missed what the story was actually about. It's easily done.

Another difficulty in workshops is criticizing a story for the wrong reasons. There are certain story subjects and styles I dislike, for whatever reason; I mustn't allow my own whims and hangups to influence my criticism of such a story. One can either say "I'm sorry, I just don't get on with this sort of story; I don't feel able to comment" – which isn't very useful in a workshop – or one can say "I don't actually like what you're doing, but I think you're doing it very well, except..." To say nothing about your own personal feelings, and then to allow them to colour your criticism, is bad. We all do it from time to time, but that doesn't make it right. It's a start to be able to realize that the reason you don't like a story might lie more in you than in the story itself. Critic, examine thyself.

Linked to this is another very common problem in workshops, which again we're all guilty of. Henry James once said: "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donné*: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it." I'm of the school that says a story comes from the soul, the guts, the depth of one's being – whatever – rather than being manufactured clinically. Look how many writers say "I write because I have to"; there is a powerful urge to express, to communicate to others, something that lurks deep inside. So you take your vision, and you write it, and it has faults, and it's criticized – but just turn a critical ear on that criticism for a moment. Much of it is valid and, however painful to hear, must be noted; if you can't learn from it, if you dismiss it all, you shouldn't be there in the first place. But some of it might actually have very little to do with how well the story is constructed, or even with what awful

sins from Sterling's lexicon you've committed. Your critics are actually trying to rewrite your story in their image, trying to impose their own vision on someone else's story. It's too easy for critics to slip unwittingly into attacking a story for not being what they would want it to be. And that's not valid criticism in a workshop – or, for that matter, in a book review. Again, we've all done it.

It's very difficult in a workshop if everyone has shredded a story, and you like it (or vice versa). There's a temptation to follow the flow, to think that everyone else must be right, that your reading of the story must be at fault. Not necessarily. It could be that you're the only person tuned in to what the writer is trying to do. The fact that the rest of the workshop don't grasp this may well be a fault of the way the story is written (or it could be that they're all just being thick; it has happened...); but your input may be the encouragement the writer needs to know that someone is on the same wavelength. And it's amazing how one dissenting voice can change the whole tenor of the criticism; suddenly everyone else begins to see what you've pointed out, whether positive or negative.

It often happens that a workshop group polarizes completely; half love a story, and half loathe it. When this happens, the workshop can really crackle with energy – and the writer can often get the most valuable and constructive criticism. For the person on the receiving end, even well-thought-out negative criticism can be constructive; unfortunately, though, all too often negative criticism becomes destructive criticism, which is no use to anyone. Sterling's Lexicon, I feel, can be mis-used in this way. As he says, it's "rough, rollicking, rule-of-thumb stuff that any ambitious subliterate guttersnipe can swiftly comprehend." You don't get too many of these at most workshops, thank the gods – but any weapon must be handled with care.

Having said all this, I still think the Lexicon is a valuable tool for the writer, in the same way as any book on "How to Write" contains useful tips and warnings (the one thing such books can't do is teach you how to write). But they're not unbreakable rules; they're not inscribed on tablets of stone. One of the most important things a writer can learn is when to ignore well-meant advice, when to break the rules, when to follow one's vision where it leads, when to realize that a critic's remarks might be valid if they were writing your story, but are actually quite irrelevant to what you're doing. And note that I certainly don't have all the answers either. I don't claim to be either a brilliant critic or a

brilliant writer. I commit many of the sins detailed not only in Sterling's Lexicon, but also in this response, in my own writing and criticism. This is why I go to workshops. Sometimes I even learn something from them.

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David V. Barrett edited the recent anthology *Digital Dreams* (NEL, £4.50), and was chairman of last year's Milford SF Writers Workshop.

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End Gait

John Clute

This time round, I counted the number of condoms. There seem to be a lot of them. They have been packed into 18,763 cartons. Each carton holds ten condoms. So there are 187,630 condoms in all. Most of them are destined, Michael Blumlein tells us in the Appendix which concludes "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration: A Case Report," to be sent to the Third World, though parts of America cast into particular despair by the Reagan presidency will also be supplied. The source of these 187,630 condoms – as readers of *Interzone* 7 will perhaps remember, for Blumlein's story first appeared here in 1984 – is the stratum granulosum of the skin of the President himself, as ablated from his body and subjected to regeneration procedures by qualified doctors. The rest of the President's body – except those parts of the upper torso necessary to maintain life – has also been subjected to the same complex processes, and the resulting products, which include everything from perfume to building struts, are also destined to give aid to those parts of the world stripped bare of resource and sanity by the American imperium. The story, which now features in **The Brains of Rats** (Scream/Press, \$25.00), shows some slight signs of ageing over the seven years; but its ending is one of the best ever written.

Beginnings are a problem, but endings are worse, certainly for the reader. The author may wrestle in the toils of creative anguish over the precise point to begin the plot-woven world of a story, knowing something of the snake of circumstance to be traced from the word Go; but the reader can generally take the beginning of any created world on faith, not knowing any better. Ignorance is bliss. The same cannot be said of endings: For the author it may be the case (as it is with Jonathan Carroll, see below) that the engine of plot is terribly hard to dismantle, trick into closure, soothe into the final period; or it may be the case (as with Ramsey Campbell) that the flow of implication and metaphor becomes almost self-fuelling, interminable in a clinical sense, and that the point where the story ends seems arbitrarily to be simply where the scissors didn't snag; or it may be the case (as it sometimes happens with Michael Blumlein) that any ending at all will betray the surreal juxtapositions of blocks of text. But any reader who has swum down the word-woven stream of any particular story shares vicariously in these dilemmas of the author. S/he must. There are no virgins in the end.

The *Brains of Rats* may be the best collection of short stories to appear in 1990 (a promotional edition of about 200 copies, differently set and ordered, did get distributed to members

of an American convention in 1989 – but how this sort of thing differs from the elaborately bound proofs endemic in American publishing rather escapes me). The title story, which also appeared in *Interzone* (in 1986), is an extraordinary meditation on the biology and language of sexual differentiation, told with remote burning-ice clarity as the hybrid report/memoir of a man whose own heterosexuality, though unmistakeable, remains culturally problematical, because he is small, pliant, "feminine," docile. But as a medical scientist, he has found a way of virally predetermining the sex of any pregnancy, and seems prepared to universally eliminate one of the sexes. Which, he has not decided. The story can only stop at this point. A true ending would be another story.

Blumlein is at his least original when, as notably in "Shed his Grace," he is most Ballardian; when, as in "Tissue Ablation," he lives in something



Michael Blumlein (Photo by Rita Roti)

like the same version of the century as Ballard does, then he is at his most penetrative. The two writers share a metonymic profligacy with American heads of state; they both manipulate with surreal candour what might be called the tools of obsession; and they both couch themselves like doctors who have learned to speak (Blumlein is in fact a medical doctor, and Ballard entered medical school, though he did not graduate). But where Ballard's

characters seem cemented into their landscapes, Blumlein's are tightrope walkers along the wire of normalcy, until the wire begins to slide, and the terms change, and the things of the world dissolve into iced collages of psychosis.

It is not recommended that anyone subject to neurotic compulsions read *The Brains of Rats*, because Blumlein describes far too accurately the oneiric ravenousness of the worlds which mean themselves, and tell you the terrible sense of every grain of sand, until you know what you must do. Never send to know for whom the clock ticks; it ticks for thee. Two stories at the end of the book – "The Wet Suit," previously unpublished, presumably because it is in no sense a generic tale; and "Bestseller," from *F&SF* – superbly shift from surreal reportage or pastiche into more conventional formats. The first is a clean complex tale of family romance resolved which might fit neatly into one's dream issue of *The New Yorker*; while the latter transforms the facile guignol of a horror tale about body parts into a poem of love for the narrator's wife and son. As a whole the volume amounts to a triumph of nerve, of growing up, of telling the tale right to the end.

In Ramsey Campbell's *Needing Ghosts* (Century, £8.99), we enter a more restricted and professional world, and a good time is had by all. Simon Mottershead – who is mad or dead or denizen of a land of dream or dangling from the claw of God – wakes up in his house, performs obligatory acts there, travels by ferry to an appalling Midlands suburb set on a kind of steppe, where he looks for his identity (and for certain books he may have himself written) in an astonishing number of bookshops which turn out not to be bookshops at all but various views of the inside of the skull, flails into a mall and a library where he addresses a small group of other residents of this terrible land, all of whom are distorted or plastoid, and most of whom whine. He escapes, he returns by the night ferry across whatever Styx it may be, finds his family at home, but they disappear, then he finds them in a state of death, then he lies down for it all to return the next day, or not, or not.

In a short prefatory note, Campbell says that his wife did not think *Needing Ghosts* was as comic as he did. Whether the clue was necessary it is forever impossible to know – but comic *Needing Ghosts* certainly is, like a Robert Aickman story starring Frankie Howerd. The main problem – perhaps because there is no necessary meaning to the tale – is that there is no necessary ending to the thing. But it is short, it is extremely well-written in parts, it is a fine old diseased gas.

(It might be noted that Mandarin have continued their repackaging of Robert Aickman stories in a volume they have chosen to call *The Unsettled Dust* [£3.99]. It contains five of the eight stories originally published in *Sub Rosa* [1968], plus three further stories, one each from *Dark Entries* [1964], *Intrusions* [1980] and *Night Voices* [1985]. These last three are credited by Mandarin to a volume entitled *The Wine-Dark Sea*, which is a bibliographical nonsense, as *The Wine-Dark Sea* is itself simply a compilation volume, posthumously assembled in 1988. Whatever. The stories – especially “The Stains” – are prime Aickman, they are about the splitting of the rails of life in mid-course, and they are full of ghosts like a fluttering of moths within the head. They are among the finest short stories of the century.)

Black Cocktail (Century, £8.99) by Jonathan Carroll comes at you like Conrad's Lord Jim, torso bent forward urgently, full of the tale of the thing, protesting slightly too much. And when it stops, it falls apart. Ingram, a gay radio host in San Francisco, loses his lover in the last earthquake; his sister suggests (for reasons he never discovers) that he contact a man named Michael Billa who, like several of Carroll's earlier diseased magi, loves to tell stories; the set of tales which seems to obsess Billa most concerns Clinton Deix, a friend of his teenage years who protected him from highschool bullies. Deix has sort of disappeared. Suddenly Ingram finds himself the victim of persistent vandalism. More and more happens. Clinton turns up, stuck in time at the age of fifteen. The plot whirls.

Answers to enough of the conundrums are packed into the final pages to satisfy any reader who does not wish to stay in the vicinity any longer than Carroll evidently did. There are superb moments, and as usual the early pages are as compulsive as anything written today in the genre. But the ending, seen from behind, is, like Lord Jim, a tinkertoyn contrivance. It does not add up to the front of the story. Still, the hidden moments of a Carroll tale, when the jeu is flowing, are worth dodging the collapse of a stout novella, when it all ends.

Note. In *Maps in a Mirror* (Tom Doherty Associates, \$19.95), Orson Scott Card has published something very similar to a collected stories. A forthcoming essay on Card, in *Interzone's* “Big Sellers” series, will have much to say about this volume. Suffice it here that all of Card is in the book – the slippery skill, the perversities of faith, the cruel knife of the voice so softly in your ear. It is a necessary book. More soon.

Pop-up Book of the 80s Nick Lowe

Few heroes of the sixties continue to publish story collections, less perhaps from market resistance to the form than because few can afford to bother with short fiction – except for editorial favours, or unusually perverse and irrepressible excess of ideas. J.G. Ballard's *War Fever* (Collins, £12.95), evidently a bit of both, has the initial look of a terminal mop-up: unlike all earlier volumes, it's indiscriminate, simply bringing together the last of Ballard's uncollected stories from the past fifteen years. In fact, though, like his last collection *Myths of the Near Future* from 1982, it's largely the product of a tight, recent burst of very high-quality short fiction that cries out to be collected while it's fresh, with a cladding of more variable older items to fill out – the missing *Bananas* pieces, the *IZ* stories, and the rare gems “Report on an Unidentified Space Station” (a Borges-in-space classic) and “Answers to a Questionnaire” (simply his funniest ever). “Memories of the Space Age” thus ends up in the wrong collection (it ideally belonged with the other, superior versions of this canvas in *Myths*), but “The Air Disaster” in the right one (becoming Ballard's *ex post facto* Lockerbie story, though written in 1975 and inexplicably overlooked in both the '76 and '82 roundups). It's a shame that the novella *Running Wild*, which would have stood well here, was necessarily locked out.

In fact, what emerges is not just the strongest Ballard collection in a couple of decades (perhaps three forgettable stories out of fourteen), but unexpectedly the most coherent. By accident or design, *War Fever* is Ballard's pop-up book of the eighties, and especially of their bizarrely-plotted dénouement. The late stories, especially, include prophetic comedies about world peace (“*War Fever*”), European unity (“*The Largest Theme Park in the World*”), AIDS (“*Love in a Colder Climate*”), the Reagan legacy (“*The Secret History of World War 3*”), and environmental

conscience (“*Dream Cargoes*”). But it would be wrong to see any of these, as presumably they will be seen by his vastly expanded readership since the pre-respectability days of *Myths*, as in any sense straightforwardly satiric pieces. On the surface accessibly funny and topical, they're still simultaneously exploring more private, perennial, and unjoking Ballardian themes. Thus there's the familiar crop of queasy messiahs, time diseases, and liberating surrenders to delusion and atrocity: little sign of exhaustion here, though the surface treatment gets ever more farcical and ironic. The sporadic formal tricks will reliably amuse (though I think “*The Index*” could have been sharpened up), but there are darker, craftier things going on behind. Ballard's glee at the absurdities of the ongoing global soap, and his unshakable faith in the crassness of fashionable optimisms, has never been better fed than in the last couple of years. He must be licking his lips at the advance of the nineties.

(Nick Lowe)

Volume Two Wendy Bradley

It is time to hibernate; lay in a stock of nourishing soup, malt whisky and Mars Bars, pull up the duvet over your head and wait for Spring. In the meantime there are some major fantasy novels to pass the time and, believe me, you will need till Spring to do them justice. We are talking doorstop-sized books here, a couple of thousand pagers, *Lord of the Rings* twice over, to go.

To begin with there is the second volume of Robert Jordan's “*The Wheel of Time*” from Tor Books: **The Great Hunt** (forthcoming in the UK from Macdonald). This is good stuff. Rand and his friends from *The Eye of the World* carry on the fight against the escaping evil one as well as continuing with their various kinds of training. The women also manage to fall for a pretty obvious trap but, having fallen for it, get matter-of-factly on with rescuing each other – and continue to believe that they are far more capable of rescuing their menfolk than vice versa which, given the society Jordan describes, is a pretty fair guess.

There are, as I have pointed out before, strong Tolkein echoes in the characterization but there are also strong Dune echoes in the Aes Sedai, the female mages who remind me more and more of the Bene Gesserit. Rand also, it is suggested, bears a striking resemblance to the grim desert dwellers who make a brief bit-part appearance here looking for their promised leader, and the Dune echoes could well



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chime stronger in the next volume. I spotted a couple of Arthurian references too – Artur Hawkwing himself, as well as Elayne's hunky brother Gawyn.

The strength of the book, though, is in the way Jordan juggles with the multiple (and multiplying) field of characters without losing any of the depth of characterization or pace of plotting. He is particularly strong on the integrity of minor characters caught up on the edges of horrific events over which they appear to have neither influence nor control.

I am not sure why exactly Artur Hawkwing's descendants should have returned as Chinamen but I shall certainly queue for the third volume – no sign of seriesism yet.

Then there is Tad Williams' *Stone of Farewell*, the second volume of "Memory, Sorrow and Thorn" and the sequel to *The Dragonbone Chair*. Here Simon makes sure Binabik gets out of the bind he was in at the end of the previous volume, does his best to deliver the sword to Josua and once more trades rescue-from-certain-death with Jiriki. The cover picture shows Simon with all his plot tokens: white arrow, magic mirror, dagger, sword – but it bugged me all the way through that he was holding the sword by the blade. Please! Scabbard or hilt! Simon is a real person after this many words, and real people would cut their hands to shreds. One warning as you are about to buy this book: the climactic fight scene on page 345 has the most frustrating misprint where the bottom half of the page is in fact from another chapter entirely and, no, they are not a straight swap but a duplication. Make sure you get the erratum slip or be prepared to howl (can I have mine now please?).

My hibernation suggestion is not entirely frivolous: these are big books, both of them, both physically and in terms of the worlds constructed in them. To write one absorbing long novel is an achievement, to write two is miraculous, and both these authors have achieved the miracle. I am tempted by a musical analogy to do with symphonies and fugues but in fact the analogy is more with Who tracks. Jordan's books are more immediately satisfying. They have a beginning, a middle and an end, and when the third volume appears it will be possible to see how each piece fits together to form the larger work. They are splendidly characterized and cleverly plotted even if the final battle in *The Great Hunt*, like the one in *The Eye of the World*, is something of a false climax inserted to give shape to the individual book. They are movements in a symphony, tracks on *Quadrophonia*, complete yet incomplete.

Williams' book is not shaped to

stand alone; it begins with the characters left scattered from the events of the first novel and then slowly brings them together ready for the climax promised in the third. At times there were sections I wanted to end, not because they were not well written or absorbing but simply because I wanted to find out what happened next. There are characters who had minor roles in *The Dragonbone Chair* who have characters and histories and stories of their own to tell in *The Stone of Farewell* and the sheer size of the novel, the sweep of character and setting, becomes almost too much to take. It is a fugue, it is the synthesizer riff at the end of *Won't Get Fooled Again* where you are holding your breath for the great scream at the end.

The Great Hunt is a good book which will always be a good book whatever the quality of the sequel, just as *Dune* is not diminished by the downward spiral of its sequels. *The Stone of Farewell* is the middle section of an unfinished work that cannot be properly judged until it is finished, just as no-one could have assessed *The Two Towers* adequately before *The Return of the King*. Buy them both and you won't look up till Spring.

(Wendy Bradley)

Short Books and Long Ken Brown

Several publishers seem to have had a great idea. Among all the three-, four- or five-hundred-page blockbusters we have a whole batch of short books. It's a pity that we can't have short prices as well. Some of these books work out at about 30 words for a penny.

One Small Step by Reginald Hill (Collins Crime Club, £8.95) is only marginally sf. To mark the 20th anniversary of his Dalziel-and-Pascoe detective series Hill looks forward another 20 years, to find Eurofed Commissioner Pascoe bringing crusty old Yorkshireman Andy Dalziel out of retirement to investigate the first murder on the moon. It's essentially a loosely plotted whodunnit, with a little bit of sex play.

Frontiersville High by Stephen Bowkett (Gollancz, £8.95) consists of four short stories and some linking material set among teenagers in an orbital colony. This is typical "young adult" fare: various kids get into stock situations (one kid gets lost, another turns out to be a robot, a new soft drink is found to be addictive) and get out of them again with a little bit of tolerance and a little bit of adventure. Discovering More About Themselves on the

way. You can almost tick off the points to be discussed in class afterwards. I imagine it's aimed at 12-to-14 year-olds, if only because the main characters seem to be 15 or 16. When I was that age I read a lot of Michael Moorcock, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Philip Dick, so I suppose this can't do much harm.

Two shortish collections from Australia: I don't know if they are going to be available in Britain, but they're both A\$12.95 from Aphelion Publications, P.O. Box 619, North Adelaide, South Australia 5006. **A Pursuit of Miracles** by George Turner contains eight short stories on the downbeat side of mainstream sf. Notable are "Not in Front of the Children," in which the life expectancy of the rich has been increased to around 300 years, death is never mentioned and the generations live in different suburbs; and the title story about a group of scientists trying to make life bearable for a genetically-engineered telepathic boy, who is legally just an experimental animal.

Rynosseros by Terry Dowling is set in an indeterminately far-future Australia with Abo tribes ruling the interior and decadent high-tech "nations" around the coast. It's not easy to describe the plots of any of the stories, which concern the travels of Captain Tom Tyson and his sand-ship Rynosseros through a world of rococo technology, robots, artificial intelligence, genetic enhancements, incomprehensible laws and tabus in which technology has been used to recreate ancient civilizations and establish a cybernetic Dreamtime. There is perhaps more style than substance here, but I found it very enjoyable. The book is dedicated to "Jack, who in 1962 made such wonderful dragons." If this is a reference to Jack Vance's *Dragon Masters*, it places the work exactly.

The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story (Collins, £12.95) is the first part of a forthcoming series by Stephen Donaldson. A notorious space pirate is seen in a bar with a beautiful woman of good family who would normally have had nothing to do with him. The incident and the events leading up to it and following from it are told and retold from a number of points of view. The story dwells on humiliation, torture and rape in some detail.

There is a 25-page Afterword by the author describing how the tale came to be written. Apparently Donaldson didn't seek publication for the original version of this story because he was ashamed of it ("I felt irrationally sure that anyone who read 'The Real Story' would see the 'real' me...") but later came back to it to supply the setting of a space opera loosely based on Wagner's Ring – which is summarized here. Donaldson has certainly put a lot of himself into this work, as well as carrying on his habit of using unsym-

BACK-ISSUE CLEARANCE SALE!

Issues 1, 5 and 7 of *Interzone* have long been out of print. Recently, issue 17 has run out – and some other numbers are also in short supply. However, we still have an abundance of certain other issues, including some surprisingly early ones. Now, in order to make space for newer magazines, we're having a clear-out of excess stocks. Between now and 1st July 1991, the following back issues are available to inland readers at **just £1 each** (postage included):

Number 2, Summer 1982 – stories by J. G. Ballard, Rachel Pollack, Alex Stewart (his debut) and Andrew Weiner, plus Tom Disch's tribute to the late Philip K. Dick.

Number 3, Autumn 1982 – stories by Nicholas Allan, Angela Carter, David Garnett, Garry Kilworth and Josephine Saxton, plus letters from Michael Moorcock and others.

Number 12, Summer 1985 – stories by Michael Bishop, M. John Harrison, Paul J. McAuley, Richard Kadrey (his debut) and Pamela Zoline, plus book reviews by Mary Gentle and a comic strip.

Number 14, Winter 1985/86 – stories by Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Bruce Sterling, Sue Thomason, Ian Watson and David Zindell, plus a Clive Barker interview and Sterling article.

Number 15, Spring 1986 – stories by John Brosnan, William Gibson, Garry Kilworth, Diana Reed and Steven Widdowson, plus a Bruce Sterling interview, Mary Gentle reviews, etc.

Number 25, Sept/Oct 1988 – stories by Christopher Burns, Peter Garratt, Nicola Griffith, David Langford, Paul Preuss and Ian Watson, plus a Terry Pratchett interview, Tom Disch on Whitley Strieber and much more. Our first bimonthly issue.

Number 26, Nov/Dec 1988 – stories by Susan Beeston (her debut), Johnny Black, Eric Brown, Terry Pratchett, Bob Shaw, John Sladek and Charles Stross, plus a Leigh Kennedy interview, Christopher Priest article, etc.

Number 27, Jan/Feb 1989 – stories by Yoshio Aramaki, Barrington Bayley, John Brosnan, Ian Lee (his debut for us), Kim Stanley Robinson and Bob Shaw, plus J. G. Ballard on his favourite sf movies, Kathy Acker and Brian Stableford interviews and more.

All other back-issues (except the out-of-print numbers 1, 5, 7 and 17) cost £2.30 each – or £1.95 each if you buy three or more. **But the eight issues annotated above you may have for just £1 each (£1.20 overseas; \$2 USA).** No extra for postage! Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU, UK.

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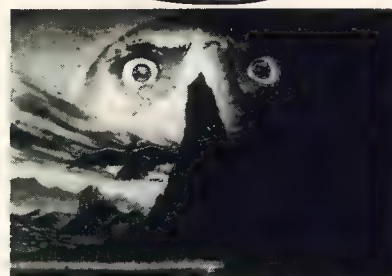
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FEATURE

pathetic protagonists. Whether it is any better written than his other novels remains to be seen. On the strength of this, he is perhaps a more interesting critic than an author.

Well, back to the long ones now. In *Phantoms* by Dean R. Koontz (Headline, £13.95, a reprint from 1983) everybody in a small town in Northern California is murdered on the same day, many with disgusting mutilations. The local sheriff and doctor, both conveniently out of town at the time (and equally conveniently young, widowed and of different sexes) investigate. A bloodthirsty suspense thriller, which rather loses pace at the end when the cause of all the destruction is revealed and sits back for some hours whilst our heroes develop a way to defeat it, like a comic-book villain who can't resist expending vast word-balloons on futile gloating. Two things to note – the book reminded me very much of Christopher Hyde's *Jericho Falls* (1986) except that in *Phantoms* a secret US chemical and biological warfare unit saves the day and in the vastly paranoid Hyde book they turn out to be the bad guys. And if Dean Koontz is reading this – why didn't they try napalm?

Christopher Hinz's *Ash Ock* (Mandarin, £3.99) is a sequel to *Liege Killer*. It's a sort of chase story and exciting enough as these things go, but I was very distracted by the silly names for things (the "Paratwa" are genetically engineered assassins with two bodies each, an "Ash Ock" is one of their leaders and, most disconcertingly of all, the leading male character is called "Gillian"). The writing is sometimes very overblown; for example: "From deep within his body an answer beckoned: a hot rhythm – pure stimuli – originating at the base of his spine, pulsing upward, trying to penetrate the translucent mask separating physical sensation from the cold logic of cerebral consciousness. Like water on a glass window, the hot rhythms condensed, transformed themselves into a wet sheen on the face of awareness. Clarity whispered. And Gillian knew that it was time to open that window, allow the unconscious assimilations to occur." If I was the publisher's editor I'd have been tempted to ask the author to change that to "Gillian thought he was about to have a good idea." Or at least tell him that "stimuli" is plural.

Bad Voltage by Jonathan Littel (Orbit, £3.99) is even harder to read; it strikes me as very 1970s. There's a list of the LPs the author was listening to when he wrote it, and Jerry Cornelius turns up half way through. This is an exuberant, violent and at times confusing punk romp through a near-future Europe, mostly set in the

caves and tunnels under Paris. If you saw *Diva* and enjoyed it, I'd suggest spending your £3.99 on a video rental and a beer, and watching the film again.

For any reader, there are inevitably some authors whose work seems so out of tune with one's own way of thinking, that it is all but impossible to read objectively or sympathetically. For me, Ben Bova is such a writer. I'm sure that *Voyagers III: Star Brothers* (Methuen, £14.99) is perfectly good Bova, even better than average. Keith Stoner and Jo Camerata, the omniscient hero and heroine of the previous book, fail to take over the world, get beaten up, tortured and generally terrorized, and flee the solar system leaving behind some of their microscopic alien symbionts in order to cure a terrible plague. All perfectly good stuff, imbued with currently fashionable nano-technology and greenness, and professionally and enjoyably written. For some reason it leaves me cold.

It might be because Bova's fictional world really is made up of a few individuals who are much more powerful, intelligent, good-looking and generally important than the vast mass of others. Some writers give the reader the impression that the people they aren't writing about, the spear-carriers, the extras, are each potentially at the centre of their own stories, even though those are not the story that is being told – they write in a fictional universe in which we are all created equal. I don't get that feeling from *Voyagers*.

The Oxygen Barons by Gregory Feeley (Ace; to be precise "Terry Carr's Ace Science Fiction Specials, edited by Damon Knight," complete with yellow dye down the cut edges of the already discolouring paper, no UK price on my copy) also concerns itself with nano-technology. Galvanix, aka Yuri Nagashima, lives and works on a Moon which is being made capable of bearing life. However, the project's backers have withdrawn and the inhabitants of the moon are involved in a futile struggle for independence. Even if they were to achieve it they would not have resources they need to complete the terraforming.

The breadth and scope of the author's imagination is impressive – nano-technology, terraforming, solitons (whatever they are), but the book really doesn't hang together as a novel. The beginning is slow and difficult to follow; the middle is a poorly-realized chase across the decaying ecology and landscape of the moon – there is no sense of actually being there, no feeling of the wind on your face as you read; and at the end the protagonist is merely told about the resolution which mostly takes place off-stage.

I'm assuming that everybody knows what nano-technology is – crudely, it's

the idea that if you can make tiny machines no larger than microorganisms, and if you can build other tiny machines capable of building such machines ("assemblers") then you are supposed to be able to do almost anything. To the sf being written now, it seems to be what computer technology was to the early 80s, with the added bonus that it doesn't actually exist yet so it's easier to fantasize about. Bova and Feeley both acknowledge Eric Drexler's *Engines of Creation* as the source of their ideas.

A few from the old greats. Jack Williamson's *Mazeway* (Mandarin, £3.99) is a visit to traditional Williamson territory, the "halo," a zone of balls of ice and near-invisible asteroids beyond the orbit of Pluto, which is where nearly all the intelligent species of the solar system come from. (This is convenient because we know the inner planets are mostly a dead loss for intelligent life and the other stars are too far to get to, so the outer solar system is all we have left). Human civilization has been all but wiped out by a giant space-dwelling creature; the only hope for us is to be accepted into a community of species that live on the Halo. Benn Dain, son of a couple who fled to the Halo after the disaster, plays a deadly Game of Blade and Stone. This involves completing a sort of assault course in competition with some humans shipped up from Earth, various nice and nasty aliens and a robot that has been taken over by a mysterious viral program from space. Benn does badly, but discovers at the end (the reader knew all along) that points are being given for how you play the game rather than whether you win or lose.

This is the sort of stuff they used to write in the thirties, Williamson was one of those who used to write it, and he still does it better than most.

In *The Boat of a Million Years* by Poul Anderson (Orbit, £3.99), we are to suppose that about one person in a million is born immortal. Most have died by accident or were killed as witches when their neighbours found that they never aged, but a few survive. The novel follows half-a-dozen of them through most of recorded history. When we get to the 20th century they are investigated and their genes become the source for immortality for all. However, the world is changed so much – as government and society wither away, and machine intelligences and those humans who want to form a vast network of mind that cannot be grasped by the primitives which the immortals now are – that they can no longer tolerate it, so they are given a starship and set forth to search for other civilizations.

The Shield of Time, also by Poul

Anderson (Tor, \$18.95), is a revisit to the Time Patrol – the author's version of the sf chestnut about a time-traveling police force interfering with past history to make sure it leads to the world they know. Both the new Anderson books are, inevitably, packed with history; indeed the first three-quarters of *Boat* consists of a series of unconnected historical vignettes. Although there is some action in China and North America it concentrates on the Middle Ages of Eastern Europe: Scandinavia, Russia, Byzantium. *The Shield of Time* is a little more complicated, partly because history is changed in it, partly because a lot of it takes place in prehistory (particularly the now-drowned land between Alaska and Kamchatka). Even so, favourite periods and characters abound. Both novels are less successful when they deal with contemporary or future periods, especially *Boat of a Million Years* which tries for more than *Shield of Time* and thus falls further short of its target. The final few chapters briefly pass over centuries of space travel, two inhabitable planets and a number of alien cultures, culminating in an unconvincing explanation for the lack of star-travelling races in the galaxy.

Be warned with these two books. They are both very large, very detailed, and quite obsessive. If you like the idea of spending a few chapters with Quannah Parker or Cardinal Richlieu, or trying to make sense of a sub-plot that hinges on the identity of Pope Innocent the Third's grandfather, you will enjoy the amount of reading needed to get through them. I do and I did.

Isaac Asimov is even more of an old favourite than Poul Anderson, but to my taste he doesn't bear up as well – and I will freely admit that that's more of a change in my taste than in Asimov's writing – I loved him when I was nine. *Robot Visions* (Gollancz, £12.95) is a collection of Robot short stories, most of which have been anthologized before (the exceptions are "Robot Visions," which is very much in the cod-mystical vein of the Asimov's recent Robot stories, "Too Bad" and "Christmas Without Rodney," which I quite liked) together with some short non-fiction pieces. Most Asimov fans will have read almost all the fiction already, and if you haven't why not start with *I, Robot*?

Frederik Pohl's *Homegoing* (Gollancz, £13.95) is about a human child brought up in a huge alien spaceship approaching Earth. He is supposedly the child of a couple of astronauts discovered drifting in space near Mars. When he gets here he finds an after-the-bomb world composed of small, high-tech green-minded communities,

who don't believe a word of what he has to say.

This is not a great book, not even a great Frederik Pohl book, but I still loved it. He just seems to know how to write. (Ken Brown)

UK Books Received October 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Ahern, Jerry. **The Survivalist 19: Final Rain.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53089-2, 220pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; part of an ongoing futuristic adventure series of a type which doesn't seem to get written in Britain [unless one counts GW Books' new "Dark Future" series as an equivalent].) 1st November.

Alderman, Gill. **The Archivist: A Black Romance.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440689-4, 380pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1989; it has been praised by M. John Harrison, Ian Watson and others; to the best of our knowledge, last year's hardcover first edition did not carry the subtitle.) 5th November.

Alderman, Gill. **The Land Beyond: A Fable.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440729-7, 306pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; Alderman's second book.) 5th November.

Ashford, David, and Patrick Collins. **Your Spaceflight Manual: How You Could be a Tourist in Space Within Twenty Years.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0178-1, 120pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Pop-technology manual, illustrated in colour; first edition.) 25th October.

Asprin, Robert. **Hit or Myth.** "Book 4 in a series to take very, very seriously." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-974520-8, 170pp, paperback, £3.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983.) 1st November.

Asprin, Robert. **Myth Directions.** "Book 3 in a series to take very, very seriously." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-966260-4, 202pp, paperback, £3.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982.) 1st November.

Auel, Jean M. **The Plains of Passage: Earth's Children.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-53527-X, 724pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Pre-historic adventure novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, etc; the accompanying publicity states that the book's US publishers have printed 1,500,000 hardcover copies; we're also informed that "in the Scandinavian countries she is the biggest selling novelist and is only rivalled by Wilbur Smith in Australia.") 1st November.

Barker, Clive. **The Great and Secret Show: The First Book of the Art.** Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617908-8, 698pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 34.) 25th October.

Baudino, Gael. **Strands of Starlight.** Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4878-8, 372pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received.) 24th January.

Beahm, George, ed. **The Stephen King Companion.** Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-19200-8, 365pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Illustrated compendium of information about King and his "world"; first published in the USA, 1989; it's fairly lightweight, chatty stuff.) 11th October.

Bova, Ben, and Byron Preiss, eds. **First Contact: The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0272-9, 343pp, hardcover, £16.95. (Illustrated pop-science essay collection, containing some fiction; first published in the USA, 1990; contributors include Isaac Asimov, Gregory Benford, David Brin, Arthur C. Clarke and Hal Clement.) 11th October.

Brown, Eric. **The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories.** Drunken Dragon Press [84 Suffolk St., Birmingham B1 1TA], ISBN 0-947578-03-X, 216pp, hardcover, £13.50. (Sf collection, first published in 1990; there is a simultaneous "de luxe" edition of 100 copies, signed by the author and priced at £35 [not seen]; this is a welcome hardcover version of a volume which was published as a paperback original by Pan Books a few months ago; reviewed by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in *Interzone* 40.) 31st October.

Butler, Octavia. **Wild Seed.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04819-0, 248pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1980; it was included by David Pringle in his *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* [1985], though it was perhaps one of his more wayward choices.) 25th October.

Carroll, Lewis. **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.** Illustrated by Malcolm Ashman. Dragon's World, ISBN 1-85028-105-X, 96pp, hardcover, £9.95. (Children's fantasy classic, first published in 1865; it's billed as "the first edition to feature full colour illustrations throughout"; Ashman's pictures are very pretty, though not particularly imaginative.) 15th November.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **Rama II.** Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4833-8, 495pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1989; this is a huge-print edition – is it intended for the short of sight?) 22nd November.

Constantine, Storm. **Hermeteach.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0282-6, 372pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 3rd January.

Cook, David. **Horselords: The Empires Trilogy, Book One.** "Forgotten Realms." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014367-X, 312pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 22nd November.

Dick, Philip K. **The Little Black Box: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Five.** Introduction by Thomas M. Disch. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04845-X, 395pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987; this is the final volume in the set of Dick's complete short stories.) 25th October.

Donnelly, Joe. **Stone.** Barrie & Jenkins, ISBN 0-7126-3740-0, 381pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a second novel by a new Scottish writer.) 1st November.

Egan, Doris. **The Gate of Ivory.** Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0375-1, 319pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 1st November.

Gemmell, David A. **The King Beyond the Gate.** "The Drenai Saga." Arrow/Legend,

ISBN 0-09-947010-1, 415pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1985; sixth Arrow printing; Gemmell continues to grow as a bestseller.) 1st November.

Gemmell, David A. **Legend**. "The Drenai Saga." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-947020-9, 432pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1984; seventh Arrow printing; the book from which the "Legend" imprint took its name.) 1st November.

Gemmell, David A. **Quest for Lost Heroes**. "His new Drenai novel." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-964340-5, 316pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990.) 1st November.

Gemmell, David A. **Waylander**. "The Drenai Saga." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-947090-X, 384pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1986; seventh Arrow printing.) 1st November.

Gribbin, John. **Father to the Man**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04849-2, 221pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 33.) 25th October.

Haldeman, Joe. **The Hemingway Hoax**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-52978-9, 155pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 15th November.

Haldeman, Joe. **The Long Habit of Living**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53536-3, 300pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Buying Time*, 1989; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 35.) 1st November.

Hutson, Sean. **Renegades**. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-19536-8, 336pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) January.

James, Peter. **Sweet Heart**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04697-X, 278pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first edition; according to the accompanying publicity material, the author has undertaken serious research into aspects of the supernatural, including reincarnation.) 31st October.

Knaak, Richard A. **Kaz, the Minotaur: Dragonance Heroes II, Volume One**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014368-8, 314pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 22nd November.

Koontz, Dean R. **Cold Fire**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0328-8, circa 352pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, simultaneous first edition [?]; proof copy received [bound photocopy of typescript, signed by the author].) 10th January.

Lambourne, Robert, Michael Shallis and Michael Shortland. **Close Encounters?: Science and Science Fiction**. Adam Hilger, ISBN 0-85274-141-3, 184pp, trade paperback, £12.95. (Critical study of sf from the scientific point of view; first edition; for a book written by two physicists and a history-of-science lecturer, it contains a surprising number of references to the movies — clearly these guys are cineastes as well as scientists.) Late entry: September publication, received in October.

Laymon, Richard. **One Rainy Night**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0407-1, 308pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 7th March.

Lem, Stanislaw. **The Cyberiad**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0471-5, 295pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf collection, first published in Polish, 1965; the translator is not credited, but we believe it's Michael Kandel, as this edition is the same as the Seabury Press one of 1974.) 1st November.

Lem, Stanislaw. **More Tales of Pirx the**

Pilot. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0470-7, 220pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf collection, first published in Polish, 1968; translated by Magdalena Majcherzyk and others.) 1st November.

Lem, Stanislaw. **The Star Diaries**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0472-3, 275pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf collection, first published in Polish, 1957-71; again, the translator is not credited, but we believe it's Michael Kandel.) 1st November.

Lucas, Penelope. **Wilderness Moon**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02033-2, 396pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Prehistoric romance in the vein of Jean M. Auel's books; first edition; proof copy received; the author is British and this is her debut novel.) 24th January.

Lumley, Brian. **Iced on Aran and Other Dreamquests**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3510-4, 244pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy collection, first edition [?]; latest volume in the Lovecraftian "Dreamlands" series.) 8th November.

Lumley, Brian. **Khai of Ancient Khem**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20839-9, 396pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1980; it has not been published in the UK before [though Lumley is British], and it deserves a prize for having the best pulp-sounding title we've seen in a long time.) 15th November.

McKinley, Robin. **The Outlaws of Sherwood**. Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4788-9, 300pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) November?

Mann, Phillip. **Wulfsyarn: A Mosaic**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04767-4, 287pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; Mann is a British-born author resident in New Zealand, and this is his fifth novel.) 1st November.

Naylor, Grant. **Better Than Life**. "The sequel to *Red Dwarf*." Viking, ISBN 0-670-83547-1, 229pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; "Grant Naylor" is a pseudonym for Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, writers of the successful TV series *Red Dwarf* [1988] and its follow-ups.) 25th October.

Niles, Douglas. **Ironhelm**. "Forgotten Realms. Book One: The Maztica Trilogy." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014366-1, 314pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 25th October.

Olson, Paul F., and David B. Silva, eds. **Post Mortem: New Tales of Ghostly Horror**. Afterword by Dean R. Koontz. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13652-2, 349pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1989; contains original stories by Ramsey Campbell, Charles L. Grant, Charles de Lint, Robert R. McCammon, William F. Nolan, Thomas Tessier and others.) 16th November.

Pratchett, Terry. **Guards! Guards!** "A Discworld Novel." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13462-7, 317pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 33.) 16th November.

Pratchett, Terry. **Moving Pictures**. "A Discworld Novel." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04763-1, 279pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 8th November.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Escape from Kathmandu**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440772-6, 314pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 37.) 22nd November.

Saberhagen, Fred. **Berserker Blue Death**.

Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04454-3, 282pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; umpteenth in the space-opera series which began with *Berserker*, 1967.) 25th October.

Shwartz, Susan. **Silk Roads and Shadows**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30662-6, 337pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 9th November.

Silverberg, Robert. **At Winter's End**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-973960-7, 491pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1988.) November?

Simmons, Dan. **Carrión Comfort**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3405-1, 992pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; winner of the 1990 Bram Stoker award; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 38.) 15th November.

Simmons, Dan. **The Fall of Hyperion**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0344-8, 468pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to the Hugo-winning *Hyperion*; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 38.) 11th April.

Simmons, Dan. **Song of Kali**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3044-7, 311pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1985; co-winner of the 1986 World Fantasy award; this is actually Headline's 1987 printing reissued with a new cover.) 15th November.

Somtow, S. P. **Moon Dance**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05017-9, 564pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received; "S.P. Somtow" is a pseudonym of Somtow Sucharitkul.) February.

Swithin, Antony. **Princes of Sandastre: The Perilous Quest for Lyonesse, Book One**. Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617852-9, 220pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 41.) 15th November.

Underwood, Tim, and Chuck Miller, eds. **Fear Itself: The Horror Fiction of Stephen King 1976-82**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31346-0, 255pp, paperback, £4.99. (Collection of critical essays about King's work; first published in the USA, 1982; contributors include Charles L. Grant, Fritz Leiber, Peter Straub, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, etc.) 9th November.

Warrington, Freda. **The Rainbow Gate**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53626-2, 381pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 37.) 1st November.

Watson, Ian. **The Flies of Memory**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04873-5, 220pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; expanded from the 1988 novella of the same title.) 8th November.

Watson, Ian. **Inquisitor**. "Warhammer 40,000." Illustrated by John Blanche and others. GW Books, ISBN 1-872372-29-5, 246pp. (Sf novel, based on the background of Games Workshop's "40K" game; first edition; the first of a new series of GW titles set in "the war-torn universe of the 41st millennium.") October.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Prophet of Akhran: Rose of the Prophet, Volume Three**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40177-7, 390pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 16th November.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Voice of the Whirlwind**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8349-4, 278pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 22nd November.

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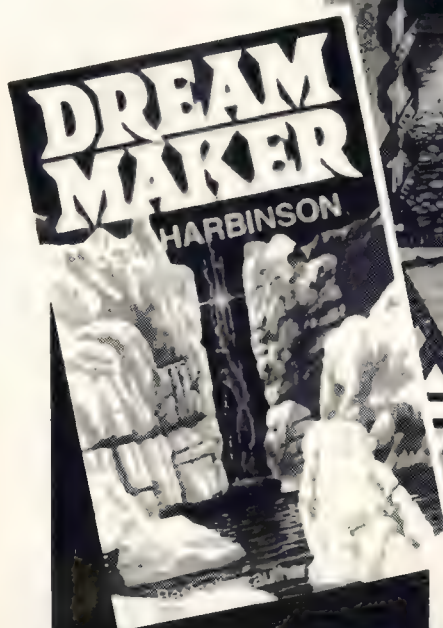
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The final volume in this classic SF series

Wingrove, David. **Chung Kuo, Book Two: The Broken Wheel.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-52834-0, 433pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it's billed as "the latest volume in one of the most outstanding literary achievements of modern times"; unfortunately, such premature hype, and the reactions it provokes in some reviewers, tend to obscure the real merits or failings of Wingrove's work.) 1st November.

Overseas Books Received

Anthony, Piers, and Roberto Fuentes, **Dead Morn.** Tafford Publishing [PO Box, 271804, Houston, TX 77277, USA], ISBN 0-9623712-2-X, 265pp, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) 30th November.

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Vintage Science Fiction: Short Novels of the 1950s.** Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-621-X, 503pp, paperback, \$8.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the UK, 1990.) 15th November.

Ballard, J. G. **The Atrocity Exhibition.** New revised edition, with notes by the author. Illustrated by Phoebe Gloeckner and Ana Barrado. Re/Search Publications [20 Romolo #B, San Francisco, CA 94133, USA], ISBN 0-940642-19-0, 140pp, hardcover, \$53. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 1970; the paperback was listed here two months ago [and reviewed by Nick Lowe in *Interzone* 43]; this is the signed, limited edition which was supposed to be simultaneous, but the publication has been delayed.) October?

Elliot, Jeffrey M. **The Work of Jack Dann: An Annotated Bibliography & Guide.** "Bibliographies of Modern Authors, No. 16." Borgo Press [PO Box 2845, San Bernardino, CA 92406, USA], ISBN 0-8095-1506-7, 128pp, paperback, \$9.95. (Author bibliography, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it includes exhaustive primary and secondary listings, introduction by Elliot and essay and interview by Dann; the first volume in this interesting series we have seen, it's recommended.) Late entry: April 1990 publication, received in October.

Elliot, Jeffrey M. **The Work of Pamela Sargent: An Annotated Bibliography & Guide.** "Bibliographies of Modern Authors, No. 13." Borgo Press, ISBN 0-89370-494-6, 80pp, paperback, \$9.95. (Author bibliography, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) Late entry: January 1990 publication, received in October.

Elliot, Jeffrey M., and Robert Reginald. **The Work of George Zebrowski: An Annotated Bibliography & Guide.** "Bibliographies of Modern Authors, No. 4." 2nd edition. Borgo Press, ISBN 0-8095-1514-8, 118pp, paperback, \$9.95. (Author bibliography; the first edition appeared in 1986; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) October.

Ellison, Harlan. **Sleepless Nights in the Procrustean Bed: Essays.** Ed. Marty Clark. "I.O. Evans Studies in the Philosophy & Criticism of Literature, Number Five." Borgo Press, ISBN 0-89370-270-7, 192pp, paperback, \$14.95. (Essay collection by a major sf/fantasy author; first published in the USA, 1984; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) Late entry: September publication, received in October.

Lewis, Anthony R. **An Annotated Bibliography of Recursive Science Fiction.** Introduction by Barry N. Malzberg. NESFA Press [Box G, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139-0910, USA], ISBN 0-915368-47-1, 56pp, paperbound, \$7. (Bibliography of sf works which refer to other sf works or sf writers; first edition; "This has always been a self-referential field..." says Malzberg in the intro.) October.

Pringle, David. **The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction.** Pharos, ISBN 0-88687-537-4, XX+407pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Reference book, first published in the UK, 1990; the original edition was subtitled "An A-Z of SF Books"; for some reason that has been dropped from the title page of this American version, which is otherwise identical [apart from the rather lurid cover which manages to mis-spell a couple of famous sf authors' names].) January?

Williams, Walter Jon. **Days of Atonement.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85118-9, 437pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 15th February.

Interaction

Continued from page 5

tic qualities of western civilization seem recorded in these letters where paper itself has become the currency – yes, a real republic of letters.

4 – *The Book of Strangers* by Ian Dallas (Gollancz 1972). Strange circular novel of a Sufi quest for mystical knowledge. Shape and substance of this book lingers.

5 – *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* by Doris Lessing (1982). The only gem of her much-disdained Canopus series. This book moves so perfectly to its icy finish that it (almost) justifies the others.

6 – No. 44, *The Mysterious Stranger* by Mark Twain (only the Mark Twain Library/University of California Press edition). The real thing, Twain's last book, funny and dream-like and fantastic.

7 – *Hebdomeros* by Giorgio deChirico (1929). This book travels through stranger landscapes and logics than almost any other book.

And how can I leave out any of these three?

8 – *Always Coming Home* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1985).

9 – *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* by Philip K. Dick (1982).

10 – *Riddley Walker* by Russell Hoban (1980).

Loved "The Angel of Goliad" in October issue – though in *The Difference Engine* (which I was lucky enough to find here in NYC before supplies evaporated in a cloud of, yes, steam), the frame-pieces (not reprinted in *IZ*) seem to change the whole flavour of the story. I think these non-narrative excursions are the most interesting sections of the book (are they Gibson's touches?).

Loyal US reader sez thanks. Less of

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* are still readily available (except for issues 1, 5, 7 and 17). They cost £2.30 each inland (postage included), or £2.50 each overseas (USA: \$4 sea mail, or \$5 air mail). However, UK purchasers who buy three or more in one order may have them at £1.95 each (i.e. post free).

the techno-jargon drivel stories. Scientific (or otherwise specialized) language is of interest principally to the specialist, and does not afford quite as many opportunities to twist and corrode.

H. Wessells
New York

Dear Editors:

Yes, I would like to see a Scottish edition of *Interzone* (especially, if I may be flippant for a moment, if it means you will publish one of my stories.)

More seriously, the form of your suggestion raises a few points.

Firstly – Scotland is not a region: it is a nation with a proud history, distinct institutions and a democratic tradition that reaches further back than does England's; a tradition, moreover, that holds the people, not parliament, as sovereign and is, therefore, arguably more democratic. (It also has a history of internecine warfare, venality and treachery that might make even the Borgias blush, but nobody's perfect.)

Secondly – Did you mean writing by Scots or writing in Scots (it's all right, I already know the answer to that one) and who qualifies? Will a "Scottish" edition of *IZ* be restricted only to people living in Scotland (this would let in many non-Scots), or those born in Scotland, or those who profess themselves to be Scottish, (and how will you know anyway?) or will the definition become so catholic as to become meaningless? Similar comments would apply to a truly regional edition also. I suspect you would have to opt for choices one or three and, of these, three is the most obvious if the exercise is to mean anything.

IMAGINARY PEOPLE

(Avatars of Dr Shade?)

Alice, Asterix, Dick Barton, Batman, Biggles, Sexton Blake, James Bond, William Brown, Billy Bunter, Nick Carter, Professor Challenger, Conan the Barbarian, Jerry Cornelius, Robinson Crusoe, Dan Dare, Count Dracula, Bulldog Drummond, Fantomas, Victor Frankenstein, Dr Fu Manchu, Dorothy Gale, Gandalf, Flash Gordon, Lemuel Gulliver, Richard Hannay, Jeff Hawke, Sherlock Holmes, Howard the Duck, the Invisible Man, Dr Jekyll, Indiana Jones, Kai Lung, King Kong, Captain Kirk, Arsene Lupin, Mad Max, Captain Marvel, Mowgli, Captain Nemo, the Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan, Allan Quatermain, Professor Quatermass, A.J. Raffles, Frank Reade, Perry Rhodan, Buck Rogers, Rupert Bear, the Saint, Doc Savage, the Scarlet Pimpernel, the Shadow, She-Who-Must-be-Obeyed, Superman, Dr Syn, Tarzan, Dick Tracy, Dr Who, Nero Wolfe and Zorro...

All of the above and over a thousand others have detailed entries in **David Pringle's** entertaining reference book *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters* (Grafton Books, 1987, hardcover, £14.95), which contains over 500 pages of vital information. See pages 7-8 of Kim Newman's story "The Original Dr Shade" (*Interzone* 36) for an apocryphal sample entry.

The publishers have now made several hundred copies of the hardback first edition of this book available to *Interzone* readers at a knock-down price. Order yours from us at **just £6**, postage and packing included – less than half the original cover price of £14.95. Make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to **124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU**. The above price of £6 is good for UK residents only; persons overseas please send £7.50 (USA \$12 seamail).

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AUTHOR INTERVIEWS IN INTERZONE

- #13, Autumn 1985: **William Gibson** (J. Hanna & J. Nicholas)
- #14, Winter 85/86: **Clive Barker** (Kim Newman)
- #15, Spring 1986: **Bruce Sterling** (D. Pringle & A. Robertson)
- #16, Summer 1986: **Iain Banks** (Kim Newman)
- #17, Autumn 1986: **John Shirley** (Richard Kadrey)
: **Gene Wolfe** (Elliott Swanson)
- #18, Winter 86/87: **M. John Harrison** (Paul Kincaid)
- #19, Spring 1987: **Gwyneth Jones** (Paul Kincaid)
- #20, Summer 1987: **Rudy Rucker** (Richard Kadrey)
- #21, Autumn 1987: **John Crowley** (Gregory Feeley)
- #22, Winter 87/88: **J.G. Ballard** (David Pringle)
: **K.W. Jeter** (Les Escott)
- #23, Spring 1988: **Karen Joy Fowler** (Paul Kincaid)
- #24, Summer 1988: **Thomas M. Disch** (Gregory Feeley)
- #25, Sep/Oct 1988: **Terry Pratchett** (Paul Kincaid)
- #26, Nov/Dec 1988: **Leigh Kennedy** (Paul Kincaid)
- #27, Jan/Feb 1989: **Kathy Acker** (Stan Nicholls)
: **Brian Stableford** (Roz Kaveney)
- #28, Mar/Apr 1989: **Ramsey Campbell** (Phillip Vine)
- #29, May/Jun 1989: **Michael Moorcock** (Colin Greenland)
: **Lisa Tuttle** (Stan Nicholls)
- #30, Jul/Aug 1989: **John Sladek** (Gregory Feeley)
- #31, Sep/Oct 1989: **C.J. Cherryh** (Stan Nicholls)
: **Stephen Gallagher** (David V. Barrett)
- #32, Nov/Dec 1989: **Michael Coney** (David V. Barrett)
- #33, Jan/Feb 1990: **Geoff Ryman** (Stan Nicholls)
- #34, Mar/Apr 1990: **Lucius Shepard** (Wendy Council)
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- #42, December 1990: **Mary Gentle** (Colin Greenland)
: **Lisa Goldstein** (Pat Murphy)
: **Pat Murphy** (Lisa Goldstein)
- #43, January 1991: **Ray Bradbury** (Stan Nicholls)
- #44, February 1991: **Joe Haldeman** (Stan Nicholls)

Thirdly – Is there such a thing as Scottish sf? I have been thinking about this topic recently anyway (and not just since Duncan Lunan's anthology) and there are a few questions to which I do not know the answers. It is easy to identify qualitative differences between say "American" and "British" sf. I remember an article in the long dead *SF Monthly* describing American sf as preoccupied with the alien and the British more with the alien within (I paraphrase), American as more hard sf, British more introspective. There are still overlaps, however (Arthur Clarke the most obvious).

Is it possible to further sub-divide? Can a strand of sf identifiable as Scottish be described? (Or is the base too small to judge?) If it can, does it bear similarities to sf written in comparable circumstances in other countries overshadowed by more powerful neighbours? (Is there a distinct Canadian sf for instance?) – I leave aside Eastern Europe here as not being directly similar. Or is the shadow so overwhelming that no differences can be seen, or, indeed, allowed to exist, within it?

You may find a Scottish edition of *Interzone* to be a strange beast indeed.

Turning to issue 41, did the gremlins get at John Clute's review or has he at last been caught out? He read as even more convoluted not to say disjointed, than usual. In particular I could only find geason (and that obs. with no plural given) in the *Shorter Oxford* so what is/are geasa? Entouselled I could not find at all, the nearest being tousel, a variant Scots spelling of the more usual tousele.

(Dr) Jack D. Stephen
Kirkcaldy, Fife

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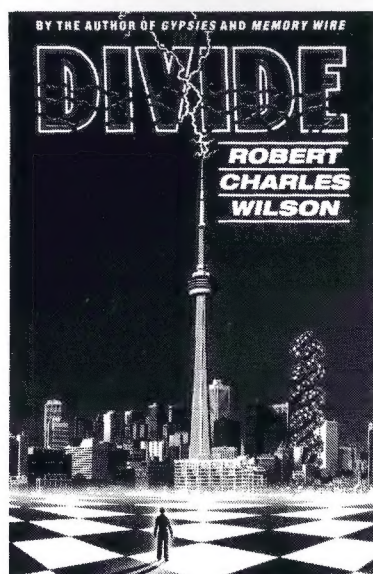
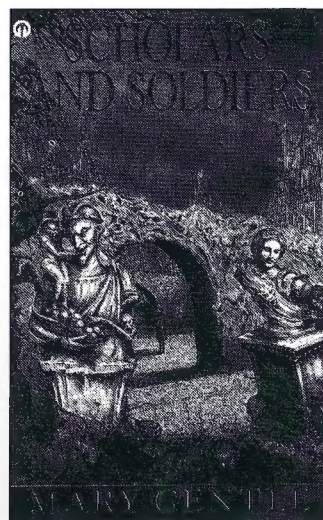
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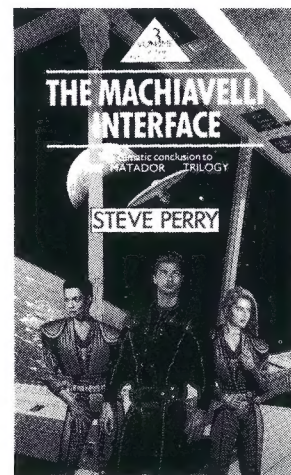
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